SUBJECT/ABJECT/OBJECT: RECONFIGURING DESIRE IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH CULTURAL PRODUCTION

by

Amy Elizabeth Romanowski

BA, University of Utah, 2003

MA, University of Utah, 2005

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This dissertation was presented

by

Amy Elizabeth Romanowski

It was defended on

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and approved by

Dr. Neil Doshi, Assistant Professor, French and Italian

Dr. Nancy Glazener, Associate Professor, English

Dr. Giuseppina Mecchia, Associate Professor, French and Italian

Dr. David Pettersen, Assistant Professor, French and Italian

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Todd W. Reeser, Professor, French and Italian

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My study situates non-normative erotics, specifically frameworks of abjective lust for that which harms or disgusts us, as an orientation of queerness that extends gender theorist Eve K. Sedgwick's idea of nonce taxonomies. The definition of queerness, the positioning of non-normative sex acts and practices outside the realm of standard sexualities, has been expanded by Sedgwick into a sequence of individual, sexualized moments. Taking up this canonical idea in queer studies offers an additional configuration to Sedgwick's imaginings, positing that abjective and sadomasochistic desires expand conceptions of queerness to include more than the body-based notions of same-sex sexual acts or other non-normative sex acts.

Informed by the theories of Julia Kristeva and Marcel Jouhandeau, my model of abjectivity insists that sexual attraction based on the pursuit of abjective properties situates queerness beyond the body, a non-normative sexual distinction that is unrestricted by object choice. I identify a series of abjective characters in twentieth-century French cultural production, including Tahar Ben Jelloun's novels *L'Enfant de sable* (1985) and *La Nuit sacrée* (1987), Jean Genet's book *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* (1942) and his play *Le Balcon* (1955), Georges Bataille's tale *Madame Edwarda* (1941), Marie Darrieussecq's novel *Truismes* (1996), Claude Chabrol's film *La Cérémonie* (1995), Virginie Despentes' and Coralie Trinh Thi's film *Baise-moi* (2000)

and Alexandre Aja's film *Haute Tension* (2003). Working from the understanding that non-normative desire is the scaffolding for queerness, my dissertation examines abjection as the provocative motor for sexual desire. I analyze the works within this project through the lens of gender theorist Judith Butler, who claims that desire for the abjective self or object choice contributes to the solidified subjectivity of both the subject and the object. Desire thus interpellates the object, permitting its entry into the world of subjectivity. In response to relentless sexual pursuit based upon abjective qualities such as disfigured gender expression or self-loathing, each figure constructs a sense of self, understanding him/herself better through understanding what makes them erotic or desirable to others. I conclude that the lust for each figure initiates periods of self-exploration that constructs a sense of self-awareness in these characters.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *La Belle et la bête*, published in 1740, told the story of a young woman who falls in love with a hideous animal prince.[1] It is, of course, only after she declares this love for him that his ugly animality fades away, restoring the beast to his original state of a beautiful and virile man, but in order for the moral of the story to bear impact on its readers, we must believe that the woman loved the prince not in spite of his grotesque appearance, but because of it. Indeed, the young woman so willingly pursues the conditions of loving the beast—his controlling temper, his misogyny, not to mention that the two belong to different species—that she eagerly discards a chance at freedom from his abuses in order to return to him. That he transforms into a handsome and normative suitor is just a convenient bonus, for what the woman ultimately wants is nothing less than the abject affections that the beast offers.

La Belle et la bête clearly struck a chord in the harmony of human desire, because in the centuries to come Villeneuve's fairy tale has been recast and retold countless times, with her contemporaries writing adaptations almost as soon as the work was circulated. The story has at times been adapted for different languages and cultural traditions, but in the twentieth century, its popularity gained true momentum as it resurfaced in the form of movies, an opera, a musical, an

[1] The story did not originate with Villeneuve; she herself claimed to have heard oral versions of the tale. Some scholars date the text to Giovanni Franceso Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti*, others to a textual digression within Lucius Apuleis' second-century novel *The Golden Ass*, and the story likely precedes even this early date.

Academy Award-winning film animated by Disney, and even television shows. Despite minor differences from work to work, however, the plot remains the same: a woman loves not a man, but a beast, who at once repulses her, horrifies her, mistreats her, and compels her desire.

The dynamic of the abject—the notion that even what repulses us magnetically draws us closer—within such a tale remains unexamined and unquestioned by audiences who accept without restriction the abject qualities present not only in the beast's appearance, but the abusive relationship that he shares with the young woman. In fact, the trend of non-normative bodies and abject attractions based on manipulations and even violence resurface elsewhere in popular culture. In the equally popular Disney adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *Dan lille havfrue* (*The Little Mermaid*), Prince Eric weds mermaid Ariel despite her original non-human form, his affections seemingly fortified by her deep potential for complicated deception.

But where *The Little Mermaid* is merely fairy tale, Malcom J. Brenner's published account of his physical and emotional relationship with a 400-pound female dolphin in *Wet Goddess: Recollections of a Dolphin Lover* claims to be a real-life love story between man and beast. Brenner's highly controversial account reminds readers in very healthy doses that bestiality is not only real, but also vilified for its abject qualities. He recounts having intercourse with a dolphin while gleefully disregarding the genuine risks to his safety and to the illegality of intercourse with an animal. Further, the ever-present *Twilight* film series revolves around the protagonist's sexual attraction to multiple inhuman males that stalk and menace her. The framework even extends to popular music; Katy Perry, in her 2010 single *E.T.*, sings of an intoxicating desire for potentially unwilling sex with an alien.[2]

[2] The lyrics to *E.T.* reveal the singer's desire for questionably consensual sex with a non-human: "Kiss me, ki-ki-kiss me/Infect me with your love and/Fill me with your poison/Take me, ta-ta-take me/Wanna be a victim, ready for abduction" (Perry). Kanye West, featured on the track,

Within each of these examples, there exists a figure—sometimes male, sometimes female, but always liminal and defiant—whose non-human ambiguity instills in others a sense of desire and longing. Desire endures not as a question of "opposite-" or same-sex attraction, but as some other category of erotics that expands to include the desire for a body whose morphology cannot conform to a normative gender, especially because animality serves to blur gender, if not biological sex. Further, these texts also introduce themes of criminality, of sexual, social and moral behaviors that reside *hors la loi*. Kidnapping, sexual assault and violence clearly violate legal codes of conduct, and even the manipulative trickery used by various figures in these works to secure attention and affection are proven to be quite effective. In the Disney films, for example, Belle loves the Beast despite having been imprisoned and abused by him, and Prince Eric weds Ariel not despite her piscine form, but for the very reason that her original fins render her "different" from all the other young women in his kingdom. These figures share in common the presence of a sexualized abjection; undesirable characteristics provoke desire far more than they repel it. What is notable within these tales is not that Ariel and the Beast are merely undesirable partners who can be transformed by the love of another. Instead, both Prince Eric and Belle fall in love not with an allegorized animal, but one real enough even in its liminality to cross lines of inter-species desire.

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responds to her submission with lyrics that suggest aggression: "I got a dirty mind/I got filthy ways […] Welcome to the danger zone/Step into the fantasy/You are not invited to the other side of sanity/They (are) calling me an alien" (Perry).

1.1 SUBJECT/ABJECT/OBJECT: THE RELATIONSHIP OF SEXUALIZED ABJECTION TO SUBJECTIVITY

The increasing persistence and popularity of texts that situate abjection as their central theme of desire suggests that there exists a general appetite for the consumption of such narratives, though it remains a topic within literary and cultural studies that requires more attention. While it may be premature to signify such works as a "genre" of abject studies, I have chosen to study a group of such texts here in order to expose that their popularity exists because of, not in spite of, their abject content and that the processes of identity building in these texts makes them relatable for their respective audiences.

My dissertation investigates the same abjective dynamic of sexuality—a term I use to comprise both physical sex acts and intangible desire— and danger latent in works like *La Belle et la bête*, but within an exclusively twentieth- and twenty-first century context that begins after 1940. I situate non-normative erotics as an orientation of queerness, focusing specifically on frameworks of abjective lust for that which scares, harms or disgusts us. My project locates queerness, which is usually used to identify same-sex attractions and the desires for and within those with non-standard body morphologies, beyond the politics of gender expression and biological sex. I am thus also able to consider the queerness of non-normative erotics in heterosexual settings. In my dissertation, queer desire becomes dislocated from body politics and exists instead as a sexualized pursuit of anti-social sentiments that range from abject violence, in the films *La Cérémonie* (1995), *Baise-moi* (2000) and *Haute Tension* (2003); to abject criminality, in Genet's *Le Balcon* (1956) and *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* (1943); and to abject ambiguity in expression of gender or humanness, in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*

(1985) and *La Nuit sacrée* (1987), Georges Bataille's *Madame Edwarda* (1941), and Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes* (1996).

Working from within the understanding that non-normative desire is the scaffolding for queerness, I carefully examine abjection in these texts as the provocative motor for sexual desire. Relying on a corpus of gender and queer theory, I claim that desire for the abject object choice contributes to the solidified subjectivity of both the subject and the object. Desire thus interpellates the object, permitting its entry into the world of subjectivity. In response to relentless sexual pursuit based upon abjective qualities such as bestiality, disfigured gender expression, or self-loathing, each figure constructs a sense of self, understanding him/herself better through understanding what makes them erotic or desirable to others. The lust for each figure initiates periods of self-exploration and self-recognition that construct a sense of self-awareness in these characters. Though these properties can neither only nor specifically be attributed to queerness, these subjectivities are cultivated via the queerness of abject desire, making them inherently queer.

1.2 THEORIES OF DESIRE, GENDER, SEXUALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

Before delving into the theoretical framework that informs my close readings of the texts treated in this dissertation, I must precisely define the intervention of my project within Gender Studies, an interposition that is only made possible by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theoretical explosion of Derridian *différ(a/e)nce*. Criticizing the polarities enabled by studying binaries, Sedgwick posits queerness as the potential to interrupt any closely held or normatively imposed understanding of what sex, intercourse, or sexuality may be. In fact, she begins *Epistemology of*

the Closet by denoting the significance of the much overlooked and often underappreciated understanding that, simply, everyone is different. And because everyone is different, something as fundamental and necessary as sex must therefore also be different. Knowing this, according to Sedgwick, is especially important for understanding marginalized and queer sexualities:

> It is probably people with the experience of oppression or subordination who have most *need* to know it; and I take the precious, devalued arts of gossip, immemorially associated in European thought with servants, with effeminate and gay men, with all women, to have to do not even so much with the transmission of necessary news as with the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one's world. The writing of a Proust or a James would be exemplary here: projects precisely of a *nonce* taxonomy, of the making and unmaking and *re*making and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world. (23)

I position my work with abjective desire as one of these nonce taxonomies, an expression and understanding of desire that makes abjective sentiment the grounding factor in a sexual or a sexualized relationship. Further, just as Sedgwick identifies gossip as a low-culture medium for understanding the importance of focusing on the smallest of details that differentiate one sexual act or expression from another, I rely on low-culture, anti-social settings in order to study the presence of the abjection within sexuality. Crimes like prostitution, theft, exploitation and murder form the background to the socio-sexual, anti-normative sexual confrontations within my texts. In fact, nonce taxonomies may flourish in such low-culture settings because here, they are less visible to normative, dominant and regulating powers.

Just prior to listing the nonce taxonomies that characterize the differences between humans and human sexual experiences, Sedgwick points at the unexpected and undefined properties of sex that contribute to queerness:

> In the particular area of sexuality, for instance, I assume that most of us know the following things that can differentiate even people of identical gender, race, nationality, class and 'sexual orientation'—each one of which, however, if taken seriously as pure *difference*, retains the unaccounted-for potential to disrupt many forms of the available thinking about sexuality. (24)

Viewing the abject as the object of desire rather than as a queer body, or rather than as a body that reinforces the queerness of a subject, resides within Sedgwick's categorization of the "unaccounted-for," as it presents the same challenge to normative structures of sex and desire that "traditional" queerness does. Taking up this canonical idea in Queer Studies offers an additional configuration to Sedgwick's imaginings, and I thus posit that abjective and sadomasochistic desires expand conceptions of queerness to include more than the body-based notions of same-sex sexual acts or other non-normative sex acts. Abjective desire is not only queer, it belongs among Sedgwick's taxonomies because whether it occurs only once, or only in relation to a precise person or to a particular set of circumstances, it pinpoints a specificity within sexual desire or sexual acts that individualizes it. Her list of taxonomies is not intended to categorize; rather, the list seeks to point out the distinctiveness of sex and its unique (and at times instantaneous) relationship to participants. When these distinctive moments disrupt normativity, as abjection does, they become queer.

But queerness is, after all, only queer in relation to normativity. My project does not seek to directly define or illuminate the processes or geneses of the regulation of human sociosexual

behavior. I do, however, position normativity throughout my dissertation as a corpus of an implementation of socially imposed standards that govern the function and display of the body, sexuality, and sexual acts, but that also seek to survey and punish human behaviors that defy such governance. Normativity, for the purposes of this work, imposes legal, religious and social codes of conduct. Queerness defies these codes, while abjection denotes a fascination with or an adherence to this defiance, acting as an additional instrument of refusal and fortifying the challenge presented by queerness.

1.3 ABJECTION: JOUHANDEAU

In order to formulate the particular queer usages of the abject in my dissertation, I rely foremost on Julia Kristeva's claims that the abject is a way of understanding the borders between what is the self and what is beyond the self. Throughout this dissertation, the term "abject" assumes many different forms. "The abject" refers to the body of theoretical conclusions decided upon by Kristeva. I use the substantive "abjection" to designate the process by which something or someone is rendered abject, while my application of "abjective" makes that process adjectival.

Kristeva was not the first to theorize about the abject; that distinction belongs to French writer Marcel Jouhandeau, whose own life was greatly marked by the abject.[3] The deeply

[3] Kristeva's work connects to Jouhandeau's through a network of French writers, beginning with Sartre. Sartre, in turn, was greatly influenced Genet, who likely understood abjection as Jouhandeau delineates the term. Because Jouhandeau was working on abjection at a point in history that was so infused with psychoanalysis, it is likely that Kristeva knew of the tortured religious philosopher. But if she found relevance in his conclusions, she chooses not to pay him credit for his theories. She does not mention him in *Powers of Horror* and his name appears neither in her notes, nor in her bibliography.

Catholic Jouhandeau experienced tremendous self-loathing regarding first his appearance, as he was born with a significant cleft palate, and later his homosexuality, as he first dedicated his writing to love for other men, then burned all his manuscripts in a fit of religious crisis and swore off any same-sex intimacy. A decade after marrying Élisabeth Toulemont, Jouhandeau composed *De l'abjection* (1939), a book of musings that reveals his complicated relationship with Christian morality, but before the end of his lifetime, he had resumed physical and emotional liaisons with male lovers.[4] Halperin pinpoints specific links between these desires and deep, abject self-shame: "For Jouhandeau, homosexuality served as a vehicle for experiencing, in a perverse imitation of Christ, the contempt of the world" (71). Notably, Jouhandeau's focus is on abjection—the processes that enhance or contribute to making something abject—while Kristeva becomes more concerned with the abject—the solidification of this process, and how it bears impact on the self.

De l'abjection builds up, in a series of essays of evil—in particular, Jouhandeau's own evil—to the notion that abjection is the single ultimate end result of evil, a state that results from indulging in same-sex desire.[5] The text forms a philosophical trajectory from desire to sin and leads to abjection. Jouhandeau remains vague throughout the duration of the book, as the individual strings of thought that comprise each chapter are often non sequitur. These passages are characterized by Halperin as "fragmentary coming-out stories, bits of perverse theology, aphorisms, erotic reveries, and prayers" (71). Though we cannot be sure of Jouhandeau's

[4] Jouhandeau's wife, a dancer, was a close friend of poet Jean Cocteau, who would eventually contribute to the popularity of the *La Belle et la bête* narrative by directing a 1946 cinematic adaptation of the tale.

[5] *De l'abjection* is the earliest theoretical text to be treated in this dissertation. We know the abject was the source of much narrative and theoretical inspiration prior to the twentieth century—remembering, of course, works like *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795) and *Liaisons dangereuses* (1782)—but a historiography of abjection is beyond the scope of this project.

objective in writing *De l'abjection*, that he did so during the 1930s suggests that the psychoanalytic studies of the period may have impacted Jouhandeau and caused him to generate such brief self-reflections.

The trajectory appears to be an attempt to repair his self-loathing, as he intimates a wish to be cured of his desire for men. Using writing as catharsis is a means to achieve this end. His references to the Bible gesture toward an exegetic wish to translate his suffering into an enigmatic lesson for others as he describes the suffering of unfulfilled desires.[6] *De l'abjection* requires to be read multiple times; first, to receive his message of suffering and then to decipher the references same-sex desire that motivates his suffering. After doing so, readers are able to perceive his rhetoric as situated between seemingly Biblical parables and a Freudian path to self-cure.

Given Kristeva's apparent disinterest in Jouhandeau, it makes the most sense to interrogate Halperin's investment in him. In order to both contextualize the French notion of abjection, and to expose the reasons for which he later found the early French author so compelling, I will trace Jouhandeau's overall argument here by extracting some of his reflections within essays that contribute to, as he saw it, the construction of abjection through sexuality. His attraction to men breaks the rules of his personal moral code, and is therefore queer. Queerness for Jouhandeau, then, is always located with the abject.

His chapters build a bridge between homosexuality as a disease and the resulting self-shame and abjection, but his poetic prose never particularly clearly elucidates a plan. The

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[6] Though Jouhandeau's religious rhetoric can be located throughout *De l'abjection*, the following prose represents a clear example of the relationship of his suffering to religion:

> La religion conditionne la passion. La religion est nécessaire au Péché, à mon péché, à la grandeur et à la gloire du Mal.
>
> Dieu, l'Être éternel, est seul supérieur à l'Âme immortelle qui participe de l'Être et du Néant. (76)

extractions analyzed here, then, very subtly signal the directionality of his work. In an essay he entitled "Connaissance du mal en moi—découverte du désir: L'Homme fin de l'homme," Jouhandeau identifies his homosexuality: "Mon idée fixe, ma tentation perpétuelle, mon péché, c'est l'Homme. L'Homme est ma passion. L'Homme est mon vice et mon vertu…Et quand je dis l'Homme, je ne dis pas la foule. Le nombre altère l'unité. Le multiple déshonore le singulier" (80). His is not a desire to love men, but to love one man, announcing not only his homosexuality, but also his emotional need to connect to a male partner. Jouhandeau then builds on this identification by admitting that he enjoys the restrictive consequences that once followed the expression of his same-sex desires.

Part C of the text, a collection of reflections called "Connaissance objective du mal: Connaissance du mal en acte, dès le moment qu'il est sorti de moi," illustrates this enjoyment:

> Je me dis parfois qu'il n'y a pas de péché, de faute absolument, mais relativement,—qu'il n'y a pas, qu'il ne peut pas y avoir de péché en moi, si ce n'est relativement à un ordre extérieur à moi, ordre que je n'ai pas choisi et que je suis toujours libre d'ignorer ou d'oublier, si j'accepte les conséquences de mon ignorance ou de mon oubli, quelles qu'elles soient, pour n'être sensible un moment qu'à une certaine fraîcheur, au plaisir de tout recommencer. (99)

Here, he explains that the sin of his expressed homosexuality is relative only according to social codes that exist at the *extérieur* of his desires. Accepting the social and cultural consequences of being gay, which include the shame that tormented Jouhandeau as a younger man, forms part of the *plaisir* he feels. He articulates that "sin" exists within him, making his own body, mind, and desires the abject border between himself—a sinner—and others, who possess perceived normativity and heterosexuality. His same-sex desires are regulated by an outside force that

exists beyond and around him, and it is this regulation that deems his desires sinful. Further, Jouhandeau accepts that he has no control over this power, though he can freely choose to ignore it in favor of relishing his own defiance. Jouhandeau's explanation signals the abject sexuality that I study throughout this dissertation; an acknowledgement that a queer sexual desire or act is socially unlawful and yet so powerful that one must embrace it. His claim allows us to consider the theoretical background of abjective sexuality as French, while also suggesting that sexual desire for the abject relates to the self.

Additionally, as Halperin will later theorize, Jouhandeau's gay desires are a monster to which he enjoys ceding control: "Chez certains le sexe comme une pieuvre énorme s'installe et leur corps, dévoré par ce monstre inséparable, devient à lui-même un spectacle constant, troublant, obsédant, cruel" (116). His association of sexual desire with an octopus taking over and devouring his body further gestures toward an understanding of the risk that accompanies indulging his desires. Like the characters studied in this dissertation, Jouhandeau first perceives danger as such an indulgence that he ultimately relishes it.

Abjection also provides him nearly the same fulfillment that his religion does. As Halperin remarks:

> Jouhandeau's happiness in abjection was not something that he intended, but neither is it something that merely happened to him. It was not a matter of intention at all. It was a transformative experience that he did not set out to have but in which he nonetheless participated, with startling and unanticipated results. The effect of his perversion, he discovered, was to lead him, through the experience of abjection, on a path exactly parallel to that of sainthood—though in the opposite direction. (72)

This very parallel has inspired my use of anti-sociality in this dissertation, motivating me to examine the counter-currents of non-normative behavior that often accompany queer sex and sexualities.

The final chapter of *De l'abjection* praises the abjection that arises from such a concession, and Jouhandeau's final musings include his most outward and open conclusion that sex and shame must share a mutual existence, each drawing sustenance from the other: "Qu'il y a un parallélisme entre les chemins de la Perfection et ceux de la Perversion, que les étapes en sont les mêmes, mais qu'à rebours elles conduisent parfois à la même Lumière par deux sortes de dénuements opposés. La Pureté préjuge de ce que l'Impureté a constaté" (196). For Jouhandeau, abjection both arises from and ends with desire.

My own work is not unlike Jouhandeau's in that it, too, examines the abjective self-loathing that surfaces in response to an abject act (or in his case, an act socially designated as abjective). His final chapter in *De l'abjection*, "Éloge de l'abjection," sings the praises of the very thing that he identifies as destructive and pervasive in his earliest musings. The book, then, bears a great likeness to each of my chapters, which begins with a self-loathing or self-deprecating character (for certain characters, this is self-imposed rather enthusiastically), most especially as Jouhandeau relates abjection as a process that lends itself to transformation, liminality and ambiguity:

> On n'est peut-être pas celui qu'on croyait. On n'est pas celui que l'on savait, mais celui que les autres croient connaître, reconnaître pour tel ou tel. Si quelqu'un a pu penser cela de moi, c'est qu'il y a quelque vérité là-dessous. On essaie d'abord de prétendre que ce n'est pas vrai, que ce n'est qu'un masque, une robe de théâtre qu'on vient de jeter sur vous par dérision et on veut les arracher, mais non; ils

adhèrent tellement qu'ils sont déjà votre visage et votre chair et c'est soi-même qu'on déchire, en voulant s'en dépouiller. (191)

The chapter appears at the end of Jouhandeau's text not as summary but rather as a tribute to abjection; this passage is listed first among his praises, suggesting that transformation is of primary importance. Liminality surfaces in these lines, the imagery of theater and masks gesturing toward an in-betweenness, and laying the groundwork for my own discussion of hybridity later in this dissertation. Openly lauding abjection also renders *De l'abjection* a companion text to two of the most prolific authors within my dissertation, Jean Genet and Georges Bataille, who each share Jouhandeau's observation of beauty and sexuality within abjective transformations.[7]

1.4 ABJECTION: KRISTEVA

More than 40 years later, Julia Kristeva revives the energy for abjection present in the 1930s and 1940s, and dedicates her book *Powers of Horror:An Essay on Abjection* (published as in 1980 as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*) to a psychoanalytic study of the abject's relationship to the self. This work constitutes a major cornerstone in not only my own understanding of the abject, but most importantly in my close readings of how the abject relates to the formation of self. Kristeva initial identification of abject insists that it can only be an object in one very specific way: "The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*" (1). In other words, the abject reminds us of what and whom we are not, delineating lines of demarcation between the self and beyond the self.

[7] Genet's brief connection to Jouhandeau will be discussed in Chapter Two.

A Bulgarian transplant to Paris who came to study psychoanalysis, Kristeva insists upon a theory of the self that is greatly informed by the work of canonical French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Perhaps the key difference between her earliest work and his is that, while Lacan views accessing society through language and vision as a subject's means of gaining subjectivity, Kristeva is more concerned with a productive understanding of the relationship of language to the self that includes language and recognition as only two parts of senses required to gain subjectivity. The dissimilarity most important for this dissertation generates from Lacan's focus on the visuality of the imaginary order, his term for the cultivation of the ego, and Kristeva's dissenting insistence that the self is formed through additional sensory faculties. Kaja Silverman explains that this visuality, in fact, restrains the subject by producing a binary of seeing the self and self-recognition:

> The mirror image can be no more assimilated than any of those other privileged objects, yet the subject defines itself entirely in relation to it. As a consequence of the irreducible distance which separates the subject from its ideal reflection, it entertains a profoundly ambivalent relationship to that reflection. It loves the coherent identity which the mirror provides. However, because the image remains external to it, it also hates that image.
>
> This radical oscillation between contrary emotions in respect to the same object characterizes all of the relationships of the imaginary order. As long as the subject remains trapped within that order, it will be unable to mediate between or escape from the binary oppositions which structure all of its perceptions; it will fluctuate between the extremes of love and hate toward objects which will undergo corresponding shifts in value. (158)

Per Kristeva's belief that we understand the self through different senses, the role of abjection seems to complicate, but productively so, the processes that Lacan identifies in the imaginary order, as it relies on other senses beyond the visual. The imaginary order contains certain parameters that Kristeva seeks to dismantle. As Madan Sarup observes, "[I]n contrast to Lacan, for whom the imaginary order functions only in a visual register, Kristeva stresses all the sensory registers. The imaginary is not only a visual order, it is also, Kristeva claims, organized by voice, touch, taste and smell" (122). These other senses—particularly as they will eventually relate to discomfort, fear, and physical and emotional pain—enhance the experience of abjection that serves to produce processes of subjectivity in the figures studied here.[8]

Though my analyses do depart from Kristeva's later approaches to the abject, specifically this initial claim, I concur with her definitions of abjection in *Powers of Horror*, especially as they pertain to its liminality.[9] Abjection is thus not only and always what disgusts, repulses, or terrifies. The abject can also be understood in relation to liminality and to ambiguity. In fact, for Kristeva, there is great ambiguity even within what disgusts or terrifies. In her opening comments of *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva carefully explains the presence of ambiguity in the abject, even when the abject is used to disgust:

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who

[8] See Sarup, 10-14 and 24-26. I must note that just as this dissertation does not provide a history of abjection, it likewise does not provide a history of the psychoanalytic subject. These differences in sensory subjectivity between Lacan's and Kristeva's work gesture toward an important point of departure between the two, as abjection resides in the response of physical senses just as much as it does in the response of psychological or emotional senses. All senses can experience abjection, marking abjection as a fully authentic experience in self-understanding.

[9] In *Black Sun* and *Tales of Love,* Kristeva associates the abject with the figure of the mother, which produces complications for reading female same-sex attraction. My differences between her understanding of the abject and mine appear in Chapter 3.

> confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance […] [A]s in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. (3)

The abject, then, occupies a border space that delineates the "here" from the "there" by signifying the presence of something that exists *because* of life though it is not, or never was, alive.

But the abject is much more than the disgusting—ambiguous or not—as Kristeva also highlights the behaviors that characterize abjection, a theory integral to this project:

> It is thus not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. . . . Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law—rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on

> the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. (4)

Kristeva's definition holds special stakes for my project. The close readings in my chapters analyze characters who inhabit the very space of "in-between" that she identifies, forming a corpus of characters that "draws attention to the fragility" of the social laws that govern bodies, sexual orientations and behaviors, and criminal acts. To return to *La Belle et la bête*, the young woman cannot resist the abject ambiguity present in the beast's physical presentation. His literacy, communication, and wealth reinforce the hybridity of the creature; indeed, he is neither man nor beast. Indeed, Disney instilled walking and talking household items into the fold of its version—a teapot, a clock, a feather duster—suggesting that protagonist Belle returns to the castle not only to enjoy the Beast's ambiguous form, but to enjoy the hybridity of these new friends, as well. Such animality serves as a helpful example of abject liminality because it positions the appealing characteristics of humanity—in the Beast's case, his charm—within the prohibited corporeal setting of the animal.

My work does, however, depart slightly from Kristeva's claims. My dissertation shows, in fact, that the abject can be the object, if the subject requires the presence of abjection in order to qualify for an encounter as sexual. The abject can also be the motorizing of desire, connecting subject to object through such a relationship to sexuality. These claims are upheld throughout my project. Indeed, I assert that the abject shares a connection with the subject, as well as the object. The abject can, in fact, contribute to the solidification of the subject when the subject relies on the abject to fulfill a sense of wanting, a sensation that arises when the subject recognizes a loss. As Kristeva claims:

> [i]f it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the very peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject. The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded…But if one imagines (and imagine one must, for it is the working imagination whose foundations are being laid here) the experience of *want* itself as logically preliminary to being and object—to the being of the object—then one understands that abjection, and even more so abjection of self, is only signified. Its signifier, then, is none but literature. (5)

In this regard, the Kristevan model of abjection has special implications for the third chapter of my dissertation, “Fear and (Self-)Loathing in Twentieth-Century French Cinema: The Case of the Crime Spree" in particular. Here, I situate the loss/want of the object of desire as the ultimate risk associated with the abject and violent sexuality that connects two lovers. Though my project does not have stakes in the Freudian and Lacanian nuances present in Kristeva's assertion, I also recognize in this chapter the critical foundation of abject self-loathing that permits abjection to materialize in relation to sexuality and sexual desire for the object. By "literature" Kristeva likely means religious text; that the signifier should be literature at all and in any form suggests that abjection, as it exists within us and outside of our bodies, is most vivid when it appears

within a textual corpus. In our *La Belle et la bête* example, the beast regains his most authentic sense of self, that associated with his human morphology, when the young woman indulges the abject desires of loving a non-human and of enduring his hardships.

Kristeva's approach to abjection is never an open theoretical approach to considering sex (even as she uses it to wonder about depression among lesbians). Nevertheless, the groundwork she establishes could be expanded to include the sexed, sexual and gendered extensions of the phenomena she cites. My ultimate task in this dissertation is to return to the queerness pinpointed by Jouhandeau and there situate the themes of repulsion, ambiguity, liminality, criminality, deceit and manipulation, all of which are later observed by Kristeva to be abjection, within the context of sex, desire and sexuality, and finally to trace the outcome of their intersectionality. In other words, I return to Jouhandeau's use of queer sexual desire as the source of shame, and I then rely on Kristeva's understandings of repulsion in order to study the formation of self-awareness. This result, as I will later discuss, emerges in the form of subjectivity.

1.5 ABJECT INTERVENTIONS

It is true that studying the Kristevan abject from within a twentieth-century French context is not an entirely new undertaking. Keith Reader has done so in his book *The Abject Object*, a project that examines the Lacanian traces in Kristeva's definitions of the abject. His work relates entirely to the phallus, and the ways in which masculinity "inexorably dwells under the sign of its own abjection" (11). He unites the Lacanian phallus with the Kristevan abject and locates points at which the two are simultaneously visible. Though his use of Kristeva will

inform my understandings of her theories of abjection, his readings of Lacan, the Symbolic, the Phallus and masculinity in general take his research in a very different direction that my own, which understands abjection with respect to sexuality and desire.

In *Straight with a Twist*, Calvin Thomas asserts that straight readers of queer theory identify with queer concepts and that they are able to "proliferate its findings and insights" within the parameters of heterosexual sex practices. His most recent book, *Masculinity, Psychoanalysis, Straight Queer Theory: Essays on Abjection on Literature, Mass Culture and Film*, explores what could be called the failures of heterosexuality, which he posits as queer. Throughout his essays on the film *Mulholland Drive*, Alfred Hitchcock classics, and Samuel Beckett as seen through a Bersanian lens, discussions of the queerness of heterosexual masculinity is what is at greatest stake. Additionally, Thomas pays special attention to the anus and anal eroticism. Part of my dissertation reflects this focus (Genet's *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*), but generally speaking, my interest in abjection and desire is much more comprehensive. I am equally interested in representations of the straight but queer female, but this interest expands to include "queering" the gay characters of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*. A final key difference is that my final chapter focuses on lesbian eroticism stimulated by criminality.

David Halperin is also interested in abjection as it relates to homosexuality between males. Indeed, his work on same-sex intercourse as the source of abject self-loathing bears the closest resemblance to my own theories of self-shame and same-sex desire. In *What Do Gay Men Want?*, he examines the fetishization of "bareback" sex, an ostensibly abjective activity because it contributes to the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, the most serious being HIV. His claim is that abjection is a *mélange* of harm and delight, a magnetic drive to self-destruction that also turns "otherwise unpleasant experiences of social degradation into

experiences of pleasure" (86). While my work shares common ground with Halperin's in that I wish to investigate why abjection is, as I have claimed, the provocative motor for desire, his interest is in examining the socio-psychological motivations behind the actual sex that occurs between actual human partners. Though abjection and "straight" queer sex intersect in reality, considering such examples outside the context of literature and within "real-life" situations lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. Halperin's focus on gay male sex will likely be very useful to me as I analyze the male same-sex desire and intimacy in Genet's works, but is nevertheless very different from my own investment in exposing the queer properties of abjection in romantic configurations of all kinds.

In summary, my work explores abjection beyond each of these preceding critical works. In terms of Reader and Halperin, I am interested in locating abjection beyond terms of male or masculine sexualities and adding to this list the female-centered subjectivities and desires. With respect to Reader's and Kristeva's work on the psychoanalytic subject, I see their work in psychoanalytic and abjective approaches to the self and raise it by considering sexuality as a key component. Thomas, whose work greatly inspired my own understanding of straight queer theory, also hesitates to expand this burgeoning domain of study too deeply into heterosexual acts and desires, leaving his work, like Reader and Halperin, at the threshold of masculinity studies. My focus on the abject positions it as the true center of my study, with masculinity, psychoanalysis, straight queer theory, and other approaches circulating in the margins.

1.6 LAW BREAKERS: FOUCAULT'S THEORY OF QUEER RESISTANCE

Each of the protagonists I examine in this dissertation draws attention to the law by transgressing it, either in terms of actual illegal activity such as murder, theft, or prostitution, or by violating social conducts of bodies, and therefore exposing not just their weaknesses, but most importantly their ineffectiveness. In this latter case, the metaphorical law-breaking occurs in the presence of, but not with the consent of, what Michel Foucault has called a vigilant and panoptic system of behavior; he who controls the panopticon has the most power. In the case of laws that define accepted and passing gender expressions and biological sexes, deviancy arises in the form of the intersexed body, illegible genders, and same-sex attractions and intercourse, which challenge the power of these laws just by virtue of their organic existence. Using the idea of the panopticon as a way of enforcing laws in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault's book, *The History of Sexuality* (1976) extends panoptic punishment to encompass those that disobey the Western and European social and cultural rules of sex, sexuality, and gender norms. Though Judith Butler has told us that these rules pre-date human record, Foucault identifies the Victorian age as the period during which such regulation gained irreversible and inescapable power. By the time the Victorian era was in full swing,

> [s]exuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the

> parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech. And sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty. (4)

Foucault's larger argument evolves over the course of the text to address homosexual sex, but his point bears impact on my project even as my work includes homosexual desire (even when intercourse is not present), as well as anti-normative, non-generational heterosexual sex. All of the characters in the texts examined pursue a sexuality that does not or cannot include generationality, and that have no stakes in heteronormative commitment, behavior or monogamy. They exhibit the distinction of abnormality that Foucault locates beyond the parents' bedroom, and though each text introduces a different penalty that its queer characters may come to pay, they consistently defy socially imposed sanctions on sexuality. Returning to the example of *La Belle et la bête*, the young woman's defiance of her father's wishes to leave the beast in exchange for a normal/normative life manifest this anti-social, anti-familial queerness.

Queerness thus exists in these texts not simply in its traditional conception—as same-sex desire—but instead promotes an understanding of sexuality as any challenge to the norms of household, family and generation that are not only socially imposed but also deeply rooted in heteronormativity and reproduction. As Foucault delineates in the quotation above, procreativity came to form the only legitimate basis of partnership in dominant Western societies, a feat that became intimately entangled with the institution of marriage. In fact, he specifies that, after the eighteenth-century, that marriage became an establishment "saturated with prescriptions":

> The sex of husband and wife was beset by rules and recommendations. The marriage relation was the most intense focus of constraints; it was spoken of more

> than anything else; more than any other relation, it was required to give a detailed accounting of itself. It was under constant surveillance: if it was found to be lacking, it had to come forward and plead its case before a witness. The "rest" remained a good deal more confused: one only has to think of the uncertain status of "sodomy," or the indifference regarding the sexuality of children. (37)

That each text contains characters whose attachment to sexuality relies on abjection—either as physical or emotional danger, or as disgust—enhances their transgressive nature. They openly defy the constraints explained by Foucault, even extending beyond the examples he gives of children's sexuality and of anal sex. Rather than engaging in sex that promotes values of well-being and happiness, the sexual encounters I study instead challenge normative constructions of safe relationships and safe sex by introducing elements that are normatively understood to detract from or diminish a sexual experience. The "safety" of monogamy, marriage, and family is confronted with the anti-social experiences of the characters in these chapters, whose desire seeks either to directly disrupt such safety or to exist unnoticed by its monitors. Such confrontations are certainly sexual—my chapters examine a gamut of queer sex acts, from same-sex attraction to prostitution to sadomasochism to bestiality—but they are also social, revealing the criminal underbelly of deceit, illegality, and danger that often enhance and accompany such erotics.

Ambiguity, the hallmark of abjection, surfaces most poignantly in the heterosexual encounters described in this dissertation. Sex becomes the outlaw not just because it defies reproduction—two partners able to reproduce but who elect not to—but because it defies generationality through what I term infertile heterosexuality. For example, after the narrator in *Truismes* eventually becomes a pig; part of the abjective allure of interspecies intercourse is the

failure of reproduction. Like the animal prince in *La Belle et la bête*, her irresistibility lies without question in her hybrid state; the narrator's patrons, like the young woman, pursue this ambiguity out of abject desire. In *Le Balcon*, the sadomasochism that rivets the brothel's clients never includes intercourse or even genital stimulation, but their sexual investment in the encounter is every bit as valid as penetrative sex. The norms identified by Foucault as family-centered are impossible during sex that prohibits procreation. These examples of anti-normative, but heterosexual, queerness showcase the manners in which this dissertation locates queerness beyond object choice and relocates it among anti-productive and anti-reproductive acts. Indeed, though my project uniquely pairs this queer rejection of heteronormative intercourse with abjection, straight queer theory, which has arisen over the last fifteen years greatly informs my analyses in this project.[10]

1.7 STRAIGHT QUEER THEORY

Those who study such phenomena largely identify Calvin Thomas as the leading, or perhaps just the loudest, voice within straight queer theory. His volume *Straight with a Twist* features Clyde Smith's essay "How I Became a Queer Heterosexual." In it, Smith speaks about coming to terms with an understanding that queerness might extend to include him, as a straight man, because he began to perceive the perforations in the heterosexuality performed around him.

[10] The straight queer figure appears in various shapes throughout the case studies presented here, and its presence serves the purpose of allegorizing a different method of challenging and disrupting social and sexual norms. I prove that straight queerness is a catalyst for personal development, and in the case of *Le Balcon* it allegorizes political revolution. It is not, however, in the scope of this project to interrogate the actual identity politics of straight queerness, as they may or may not exist.

As in Sedgwick, informal transmissions about sexual proclivities became vital sources of information gathering:

> This devoted couple were swingers, that straight-identified person was on his knees at the Church of Priapus, and so forth. Gossip provided a glance backstage at the behavior of people I only knew casually. Though gossip allows for a high degree of inaccuracy and certain of my cohorts had well-deserved reputations as unreliable narrators, I began to piece together a sense of what was not visible in a city where so much was already on display. Not only was I learning that things are not as they seem and that human sexual activities are complex in ways that go beyond labels such as gay and straight but that many if not most of us have unrevealed potentials for experimentation.[11] (63)

Surprisingly, Smith does not cite Sedgwick in the essay, because his conclusions reiterate her observations of nonce taxonomies within human sexual behavior. Unrevealed potential abounds in the texts studied in this dissertation, as both abject violence and/or abject ambiguity characterize the sexual and romantic relationships of each protagonist. Richard Fantina extends Smith's conclusions in the introduction to his edited volume, *Straight Writ Queer*, a compilation of essays dedicated to normatively challenging themes like gynosodomy, masochism, and sexually dominant women. Fantina contends that "an interrogation of some straight sexual practices demonstrates that many of these can be as subversive to patriarchal values and institutions as same-sex practices" (14).

Inspired by Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Calvin Thomas reminds us that "[i]f straightness […] depends structurally less on other-sex desire than

[11] The Church of Priapus is a North American religion that worships the penis.

on abjected queer identification, then to profess straightness is always to acknowledge that, on some level, *one must have already taken oneself for a queer*" (30). Queerness exists first unconsciously, and it comes into acknowledgement only when another has confirmed its existence through interpellation. For Thomas, a heterosexual, this interpellation occurred when he expressed as a youth an aversion to children, a man called him a queer; and again as a grown man, when while walking in a gay neighborhood a group of men harassed him for being a queer (32). For the protagonists in my study, their essential interpellation, critical for understanding their queerness, arrives through experiencing the lust of those tantalized by their abjective qualities. Abject desire interpellates these figures, as well as those I study, and they gain subjectivity by responding and entering into queerness.[12] This process toward personhood comes to life in the works encompassed by this project.

1.8 QUEER DESIRE, QUEER SUBJECTS: THEORIES OF DESIRE AND SUBJECTIVITY

This concept of desire sanctioning identity or subjectivity originates with Judith Butler. For her, the legibility of the body may be in part constructed by an ability to feel an emotional connection to that body. In *Undoing Gender*, she analyses the transsexual and the intersex body, claiming that these bodies exist at the limits of human intelligibility for this very reason. But in order to understand Butler's observations, we must also understand the late David Reimer.

[12] Thomas continues his discussion of abjection and desire in *Masculinity, Psychoanalysis, Straight Queer Theory: Essays on Abjection in Literature, Mass Culture and Film*, but his analyses relate almost entirely to the study of the male body. The scope of my dissertation includes the study of maleness as but one of its various points of consideration.

Using the Reimer situation as an example, Butler recounts the psychological terrorism he underwent as a child.[13] Born as a non-intersex twin boy, a doctor nearly burned off the entirety of the baby's penis during his circumcision. Doctor John Money at Johns Hopkins University advised his parents to have a surgeon perform sexual reassignment surgery and then to raise David as a girl. He, in turn, would benefit as a researcher by measuring "Brenda"'s development to that of his twin brother throughout their childhood; part of his experiments included asking the children to simulate intercourse. As an adult and living as a man, Reimer spoke openly about the intimate connections between his self-worth and the self-recognition he felt at being the object of another's affections.

Though an extreme example of vicious medical malpractice, Butler uses Reimer's case in order to expose the problems of surgery in intersexed children. She insists that a "criterion that posits coherent gender as a presupposition of humanness, is not only one which, justly or unjustly, governs the recognizability of the human, but one that informs the ways we do or do not recognize ourselves at the level of feeling, desire, and the body" (58). In other words, when a body evokes desire in another, that body becomes the object of desire and is consequently understood to be human. Misunderstandings about differently gendered bodies often make such figures seem non-human because they are not easily categorized along essential gender lines. The desire of those who connect (or who wish to connect) intimately with differently gendered bodies can be said to expose, or to interpellate, the (already present) humanity of these objects of desire.

[13] Butler's use of Reimer's case poignantly underscores the importance of her message. His sexual reassignment surgery at the age of 22 months caused him terrible lifelong grief that he never overcame, and he killed himself in 2004 at only 38 years old.

In other words, desire authorizes subjectivity and suggests that whatever the gender expression or sexual orientation at hand, desire for its (il)legibility lends the object of desire agency and autonomy. In each of the works that I study, the protagonists display a sexuality characterized by abject loathing, violence, criminality or ambiguity. Once a partner levels desire at that abjective figure, the solidification of subjectivity ensues. Revisiting the text *La Belle et la bête*, we remember that the beast undergoes the rather remarkable transformation of not only returning to his original physical state but also gaining a refined psychological state, as well. In fact, part of this fairy tale's appeal as a children's story exists in the moral that the beast "finds himself" by virtue of enjoying the young woman's affection and desire; she loves him "as-is," abjective traits and all. The fact that the story itself is so ancient, and has persisted within so many cultures over such an expanse of time, suggests that the narrative cannot be reduced to the Westernized, twentieth-century fantasy of a female winning over a so-called "bad boy." Violence and imprisonment are frightening tools of subjugation, and bestiality violates legal and social law while prohibiting procreativity. The woman's desire for him does enable his transformation back to a human male, but her desire for his form does not originate with an interest in his humanity.

Because this variety of desire must be carefully constructed so as to permit the object of desire to gain, or to regain, subjectivity, it is here that Luce Irigaray's theories of love and agency in *I Love to You* become especially significant. Irigaray criticizes the ineffectiveness of the French language (though I use the English translation of her text), in expressing love to someone grammatically represented by a direct object. Interjecting the indirect object "to" permits the object of desire to experience affection and desire in a way that validates, or at least does not disturb, his or her sense of self. Like Thomas, she also senses an interpellation in desire: "*I love*

to you means I maintain a relation of indirection to you. I do not subjugate you or consume you. I respect you (as irreducible). *I hail you: in you I hail*. I praise you: in you I praise" (109).[14] Thus, Irigaray suggests that desire summons the object of desire into a subject of desire, refusing interference with its agency.

Replacing "I love you" with "I love to you" reduces the selfishness of desire and permits the object of desire to exist autonomously and without fear of reduction from an individual to a couple:

> The 'to' is the site of non-reduction of the person to the object. I love you, I desire you, I take you, I seduce you, I order you, I instruct you, and so on, always risk annihilating the alterity of the other, or transforming him/her into my property, my object, of reducing him/her to what is mine, into mine, meaning what is already a part of my field of existential or material properties. (110)

Despite its abjective qualities, even in the cases of criminality, deception, and violence that appear in his dissertation, the object of desire does not absorb or internalize the abjection to which it may be attracted, or even the abjection that motorizes attention in its direction. Rather, abjection nourishes a floundering sense of self that in turn flourishes and develops.

Irigaray's work resonates with my own in one final nuance; she, also, perceives that a sense of unity or community arises between the subject and the object, the object itself now a subject of its own. In the texts that appear in this dissertation, the two parties construct an exclusive kinship that separates them from those that do not share their queerness; in Genet's works, this connection even extends to an entire group of like-minded queer characters. Irigaray

[14] Emphasis mine.

describes this unique bond in heterosexual, but not intentionally or solely heteronormative terms, and does specify that sexuality plays a special role in it:

> These intentionalities cannot be reduced to *one*. It is not enough to look ahead in the same direction, as Saint-Exupéry says, or even to ally rather than abolish differences. Man and woman, faithful to their identity, do not have the same intentionality, as they are not of the same gender, and do not occupy the same genealogical position. But they can make commitments to act together according to terms of agreement that render their intentionalities compatible: to build a culture of sexuality together, for example, or to construct a politics of difference.
>
> In realizing our intentionality, each one of us can find support from alliances such as these. (112)

Her use of "intentionality" simply symbolizes the potent combination of personality and personal experience that remains innate in each human, and which should remain intact, if not enhanced, when receiving erotic and romantic affections. For Irigaray, then, intentionalities must ideally coalesce into a harmony that helps both parties to achieve goals. That she pinpoints cultures of sexuality and a politics of difference bears special importance for my project; the cultures of sexuality in the texts I study form a politics of difference that strains against impositions of social and socio-sexual regulation. And these cultures, according to Irigaray, arrive via a commitment that originates from desire that compels a thriving subjectivity within its object. The abject desire for Zahra in *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée* leads her toward true love and self-reconciliation. The currents of criminal erotics that run between the characters in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon* congeal into a community of sexual subversion. In *La Cérémonie*, *Haute Tension*, and *Baise-moi*, one member of the female pair uses abject self-loathing and

violent sexuality as a means of constructing herself as individual, while in *Truismes* and *Madame Edwarda*, abject lust directed toward animality permits Darrieussecq's narrator a path toward self-knowledge, while crafting an abjective and sexual space just for Bataille's prostitute and her client. The chapters that follow establish an archetype of "outlawed" and abjective genders, behaviors, desires and sexual acts, each chapter presenting great variations of these themes and thus reinforcing my claim that abjective sexuality can be positioned as a nonce taxonomy.

1.9 CORPUS AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

Beyond the groupings that situate them in particular chapters, the above-mentioned texts have little to do with one another beyond the undeniable presence of abjection in their very graphic themes of sex and/or violence. This project is distinctive as it does not propose a history of either Queer Studies or of literary abjection. My goal is not to position these domains in relation to each other within a historiography. The works used in this dissertation were chosen as representative case studies, each one selected to present a mix of abjection and sexuality that showcases my ultimate objective of demonstrating that abjection, like body-choice, can be situated as a nonce taxonomy. Each work also introduces a character or characters that not only relies on abjective sexuality for arousal, but also as a contribution to the construction, or to the reconstruction of, subjectivity.

The chapters that follow rely on the theories discussed in this introduction to illustrate the deeper importance of abjection as a sexual and psychological instrument of desire and sex. Where Jouhandeau and Kristeva have given us understandings of what abjection is, I extend their claims to locate abjection within outlaw settings of sex, gender and sexuality. In other words, I

locate it well within queerness but examine, as Jouhandeau does not, the coupling of abjection and sexuality beyond the relationship of homosexuality and religion. From here, building on the assertions of Thomas, Fantina and Smith that pinpoint the queer properties of anti-normative, anti-reproductive, anti-generational sex, I demonstrate that heterosexual sex is as effective a means of transgression as any other queer maneuver. And where Butler and Irigaray have raised issues of desire as interpellation, I prove that a sense of self and/or community has been summoned by abjective sex and desire in each of the works discussed.

Because a sense of self must be cultivated in relationship to acknowledging the presence of another, this connectivity serves to highlight the importance of abjection in the relationships showcased. The authorization of identity, achieved through interpellative desire, allows figures not only to develop self-awareness, but to expand their awareness of others. In each work, connections are forged between its actors that form a sense of community or a connective bond, however small. In the case of *Madame Edwarda*, this involves only Edwarda and her client; yet, in *Le Balcon*, this includes the prostitutes, clients and staff of a brothel. I do not go so far as to insist that to perceive like-minded abjective desire in another forms a political identity—these characters do not, "come out" as abjective—but rather, in being acknowledged as a subject by another, they in turn are able to acknowledge the subjectivity of that other.

The texts examined in this dissertation are grouped together into chapters because they bear important similarities regarding the manifestations of sex and desire that emerge within them, a logic I explain in detail within this outline. It must be noted that the texts studied here do not provide a comprehensive study of what "the abject" is, nor how its position within post-structuralism has evolved. I am interested in examining the relationship of the abject to sexuality in a series of seemingly otherwise unrelated texts. In doing so, I prove that the presence of the

abject very often occurs in connection to sexuality, therefore concluding that abjection and sexuality are organically linked. The two themes are also closely related to the development of a sense of self, in much the same way that sexuality informs burgeoning identities in terms of politics and orientation. The texts that follow form a corpus of case studies that serve to meet the goal of proving these points. The common ground of the abject, desire and identity unites the texts, as the figures I study each share these themes.

Furthermore, the figures in the texts interrogated here manifest and represent a great variety of sexualities, gender expressions, corporeal morphologies and modalities of intercourse. In fact, most of these characters display many nuances of these components even over the course of one text. My work, rather than honing in on one specific trope—homosexuality, maleness, sadomasochism—treats this very diverse cast of texts and characters precisely to prove that the potent combination of abjection and sexuality bears impact on an entire range of potential subjectivities. Abjection's very queerness lies in this tremendous versatility, for rather than assuming a specific role in relationship to a specific kind of identity, it manifests in very different, but very meaningful, ways from text to text and from character to character. Such diverse manifestations are precisely what renders abjective sexuality a nonce taxonomy.

In Chapter One, "The Abject, the Deject and the Subject in Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*," I study Tahar Ben Jelloun's companion novels that follow the evolution of Zahra, born a girl but raised as a boy. *L'Enfant de sable* is a paradigmatic text with which to begin my analysis because the protagonist's gender expression is decidedly liminal, making the work easily locatable in the Kristevan abject. Because of the text's sequel and readers' ability to trace Zahra's journey toward full personhood, her relationship to subjecthood through abjection makes her story the most poignant of all the figures studied here. Readers

have much more information about Zahra, making her subjectivity an ideal place to begin this dissertation. Unlike other discussions of these works, especially of *L'Enfant de sable*, mine is not exclusively interested in positioning a complicated gender identity within a Maghrebi setting, though her femaleness, lost and then reacquired, does form a source of abjective contempt for a non-woman in an impoverished Moroccan setting.

Though Zahra's genitals are standard and her humanity is unquestioned, her blurred gender expression remains illegible to those around her. The reception of this blended gender provokes disgust, confusion and pity in those around her, but in certain cases, desire accompanies these abject sentiments, as those that perceive her ambiguity experience abject arousal. This gaze is central to my argument, as Zahra's own sexuality, borne of the abject violence and manipulation in *L'Enfant de sable*, solidifies as abjective itself, as she develops a personality and set of desires that are provoked by sexualized abjection in *La Nuit sacrée*. My analysis proves that this abject desire reinstates a sense of self in Zahra's fractured sense of identity. The abject desire generated *toward* Zahra will become the abject desire generated *by* Zahra, and the sexual and romantic relationships she pursues in *La Nuit sacrée* are marked by the same sexualized manipulations and coercion that characterize the sexual violations of her early adulthood in *L'Enfant de sable*. In the sequel, I prove that the evolution of Zahra's sexuality from abject victimization to abject and sexual agency corresponds to the sense of self that she simultaneously cultivates.

Even after she chooses to live life as an adult woman, Zahra's expression of gender and her acceptance of her heterosexual (though as we will see, decidedly non-heteronormative) desires never ultimately situate her within the standard parameters of femaleness. As a result of this resistance, her biological femaleness is compromised after she is made the target of a violent

sexual assault, and even her bodily morphology defies the regulation of a sexed body. Her sexed body and her gendered mind violate rules of culture and normativity. Thus, by the end of *La Nuit sacrée*, she becomes what Kate Bornstein calls a gender outlaw, making the companion novels paradigmatic contexts by which to launch my discussion of abjection, liminality and desire.

The second chapter of this dissertation, entitled "Abject Choice as Object Choice: Anti-Social Sexual Revolution in Jean Genet's *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon*," examines gender outlaws in far more literal terms, as I turn my attention to the abject desire generated by criminal acts within these two presentations of desire, abjection, sex, and criminality. This discussion is positioned second in order respond to the themes of the gender "outlaw" raised by Zahra's transgressive gender expression and desires, for in this chapter, I argue that the anti-sociality of criminal behavior represents a small-scale revolution in its challenge to normative structures of lawfully regulated behaviors in the same fashion that queerness resists the standardized policing of sex and gender norms. In *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, the novel for which Genet is perhaps most notorious, I demonstrate that anti-social illegal actions, ranging from thievery to prostitution to murder, inform the anti-social queer sexualities of various male prostitutes in the Parisian neighborhood of Montmartre. With non-legal social acts come non-legal sexual acts, forming a sense of community within these queer figures. For example, the male prostitute Divine passes unconvincingly, violating social norms of gender expression. Her own criminal behavior of prostitution and theft compliments that of her lover, Mignon, and creates a current of abject sexual attraction between them. Divine also develops very maternal, but very sexual, feelings for Notre-Dame, Mignon's son and a legal minor, there violating social contracts of incest, family dynamics, and statutory rape.

Likewise, in the play *Le Balcon*, I prove that the tropes of revolution occurring outside the walls of a famous Parisian brothel reflect the sexual rebellion, of sorts, that takes place within the whorehouse. Here, I claim that the themes of sadomasochism and bestiality that characterize the fantasy role-playing between the prostitutes and their patrons represent the power within sexuality to defy Foucauldian behavioral policing, reinforcing, as Zahra does in Chapter One, that queerness thrives within heterosexuality.

But though Genet's descriptions of sexuality never lack detail, he does not describe the crimes of his characters with great nuance. The murder committed by Notre-Dame, a teenaged prostitute who murders a much older client for his failure to achieve an erection, does not bear much description even when the young man is brought to trial for his crime. Genet tends to describe violence through innuendo, often using very dry humor and sarcasm to reveal the intersectionality of sexuality, criminality and abjection.

The subtleties of his descriptions contain much more graphic depiction of sex than of the violence that fuels much of the abjective desire experienced by his characters. These understated representations of criminal abjection led me to include the third chapter of this dissertation, “Fear and (Self-)Loathing in French Cinema: The Case of the Crime Spree" as a continuation of the discussion launched in Chapter Two, in which I trace the abject sex and violence in Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie*, Virginie Despentes' and Coralie Trinh Thi's *Baise-moi* and Alexandre Aja's *Haute Tension*. This chapter arrives third as these works continue the discussion of outlawed sex and desire. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the abject self-loathing present in one woman of each of three pairs of female friendships surfaces as an appetite for violent, destructive sexual behavior. Here, the cinematic format becomes the focal point, as it confronts viewers with little choice in misunderstanding the protagonists' violence, for their cruelty cannot

be mitigated. Furthermore, the selected films all present the vessel of the female form as the site of the abject action. Though Genet's texts contain characters of mixed gender expression, the figure of the woman bears special relevance for the study of violence, sex and film. In each of the films that I study, the violence of the protagonists involves either penetration or the precise aim of a weapon, therefore proving that their queerness emerges as they use this violence to effect, replace, or enhance intercourse. These women silence their inner voices of self-hatred as their queerness, and thus their sense of self, solidifies, traveling the same passage toward selfhood as Zahra and Genet's queer communities.

For example, in *La Cérémonie*, uneducated Sophie relies on the hyperliterate Jeanne in order to soothe the shame of her illiteracy. Initially attracted to Jeanne's access to language, the pair is most drawn to each other upon discovering each other's violent and manipulative past. Through this violent connection, Sophie gains self-confidence and self-esteem via her connection to Jeanne's literacy, and the murder they commit of their mutual foes bonds the women together. In *Baise-moi*, oppressed and victimized Manu gains agency and autonomy through her erotic partnership with Nadine, a friendship generated by the women's common interest in the sexual exploitation and injury of others. Manu's renewed sense of self-worth is possible only because of her connection with Nadine and the brutality they exercise. And in *Haute Tension*, the violence that Marie perpetrates against her friend Alex serves to symbolize the affection and sexuality that the heterosexual Alex will never feel for Marie. This violence, then, comes to represent Marie's coming-out, the announcement of her same-sex attractions arriving through her violent acts. This chapter discusses the defiance of queer, abject desire in these female protagonists, as the previous two have treated a similar defiance. It is not that bodies do not matter in these chapters; they simply never form the text's primary vehicle of resistance.

The final chapter, "Spaces, Places and Sex in Bataille's *Madame Edwarda* and Darrieussecq's *Truismes*," responds to these previous analyses by examining female characters whose queer challenge is slightly in reverse; their femaleness goes unchallenged, but their womanhood—in fact, their very humanity—poses an increasingly queer threat as they transform from woman to animal. The abject desire experienced for these female bodies revolves around their liminal bestiality, as the desire they instill in their partners stems from an erotic appreciation of their animality.

In this final chapter, I prove that the relationship of the queer and hybrid body to the space surrounding it serves one of two purposes: to conceal this queerness, permitting it to escape the pressure of the panopticon and to exist undetected, or to reveal it, therefore drawing attention to its queerness and exposing the queer properties of anti-normative heterosexual desire. In the case of Madame Edwarda, whom Bataille's narrator finds both filthy and enticing, their public lovemaking creates a space of queerness that puts their abjective sexualities on display. His abject desire propels her into a series of metaphorical animals, and, using Bataille's own theories of eroticism, I demonstrate that Edwarda's path toward subjectivity occurs as death. However, a Butlerian framework of desire as interpellation of subjectivity helps me to prove that the hybrid animality of Darrieussecq's anonymous narrator, who evolves to be increasingly porcine as the text unfolds, provokes an ever-greater desire in her lovers over the course of her transformation. The more they desire her, the more she develops into a sow, and thus the more she cultivates self-confidence, pride and an investment in her own education. Positioning this chapter as the final chapter allows me to gesture toward new directionalities for the interrogation of future intersectionalities of anti-normative heterosexualities, queerness, and space. If we are only just beginning to understand the relationship to queer re-appropriations of normative

space—such as gay sex in a men's restroom—what are the stakes for Straight Queer Theory in considering its relationship to spatial circumstances? In both *Madame Edwarda* and *Truismes*, the women work as prostitutes in the normatively mechanized site of the whorehouse; what happens when straight queerness inhabits a "standard" straight space? As in *La Belle et la bête*, the young woman and her princely beast inhabit a magical castle; are the properties of queer heterosexuality so untenable that their "space" must be fantastic?

The dissertation that follows thus carefully extracts the presence of the abject in each of the works it examines, relating it to the great variety of sexual acts and behaviors, and gender expressions and resistances that occur from piece to piece. At the heart of it all, I wonder: where might abjection and anti-sociality fit into to straight, and other, queerness? The question is not related to identity politics, in the sense that there should be abjective erotics should be understood as an organic nonce taxonomy. Rather, if queerness can expand to include heterosexual manifestations of defiant sexuality, is queerness supple enough to also incorporate anti-social sentiment, and abjective erotics, into an understanding of social and sexual rebellions and dislocations?

2.0 THE ABJECT, THE DEJECT AND THE SUBJECT IN BEN JELLOUN'S *L'ENFANT DE SABLE* AND *LA NUIT SACRÉE*

At the behest of her father, a man weary of raising daughters and eager for the legacy only a son can bring, Zahra lives as a male from childhood into early adulthood. Only her parents know of her true biological sex. But as the boy grows into a young man, confusion and frustration mounts: for her parents, as they watch her impotent attempts to fulfill her manhood, and for Zahra as her body and her desire defy the identity she has so painstakingly executed. She eventually elects to leave her family and explore her womanhood.[15]

The transition that results from such self-exploration enables Zahra to change from passing adult man to passing adult woman, though the transformation cannot suitably be termed *transsexual*. The identity of Ahmed is imposed upon her by her family, and she need not undergo changes to her corporeal morphology to live as a woman. But though her genitals are standard, her psychological past has blurred any possible clear self-understanding of her gender, a splintered gender presentation that disfigures Zahra, compromising her legibility as a woman and as a man. The reception of her blended gender identity provokes disgust and fear, coupled with desire and lust, not simply within those around her, but also within Zahra herself, erotic responses to a womanhood complicated by maleness.

[15] Throughout my discussion of the protagonist, I refer to her as Zahra, even during the period in which she lives as Ahmed. Because she exercises agency in selecting this name as she explores her womanhood, and because she presents herself only as a woman in *La Nuit sacrée*, Zahra is the most coherent way by which to refer to her in *L'Enfant de sable*.

Kristeva's theories in *Powers of Horror* of the abject and its spatial relationship to the deject are central to my argument of this chapter, which capitalizes on Zahra's quintessential role as both the abject and the deject. My intervention in this arena is to demonstrate that the magnetism generated by her abjection permits the involuntary and voluntary sexual experiences that she requires in order to cultivate a solidified subjectivity; as Kristeva has shown us, the abject secures the subject and thus permits an "abject-ivity," or a subject that is cast in abjection. The more that she understands about her sexual body, the more that Ahmed gives way to Zahra. And although Zahra disappears at the end of *L'Enfant de sable*, her emergence in the sequel *La Nuit sacrée* allows an examination of what becomes of this heterosexual, but highly non-normative, woman. *L'Enfant de sable* ends with a discrete sex—Zahra is female—but simultaneously suggests a complex and non-discrete sex. Finally, this dissertation exposes repeating patterns of desire for abject sex within the text, suggesting that abjective erotics are not individualized or fetishized, but rather reiterate as a sexual nonce taxonomy. The abject is the object choice.

2.1 THE BODY MOROCCAN

My work examines the specific network of sexuality present in *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*. And though Zahra's enigmatic sexuality is not absent from previous academic focus, it is studied only in relation to other themes. For Rebecca Saunders, who addresses *L'Enfant de sable*, Zahra forms a corporeal and narrative landscape that allegorizes the burgeoning nation-state of Morocco. She claims that the text

> formulates the proposition that gender is a colonization of the body by melding together the troubled gender identity of its main character with the (de)colonization of Morocco and a reticulate narrative architecture of multiple and feuding storytellers, enigmatic journals, and mysterious letters. (136)

Though Saunders accurately pinpoints metaphors for the de-colonization of Morocco within Zahras's de-masculinization, her analysis oversimplifies Zahra's complicated gender expression by failing to account for the sexuality that constantly and consistently accompanies her transition. Saunders also leaves *La Nuit sacrée* unexamined. An understanding that Zahra's body, de-colonized of standard gender, should represent de-colonized Morocco is incomplete without also interrogating Zahra's form in *La Nuit sacrée* and its relation to the more recent Moroccan state. Jarrod Hayes also reads Zahra's body as metaphor for the nation, both in *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*, correctly pinpointing Zahra's defiance of social gender norms, but he does not discuss the defiance of the desire circulating in the texts. It is not just her body, but her desire, that defies social standards.

Saunders and Hayes are not incorrect that the body allegorizes that nation of Morocco in *L'Enfant de sable*. Understanding this nation's history makes it clear that Zahra represents the political tension that has surfaced there over the last century. Mounira M. Charrad describes the national politics in the Maghreb that contribute to Morroco as it is known today:

> The important similarity among many old societies and new states is that loyalists and foci of solidarity rested with the collectivities themselves rather than with nation-wide institutions. Postcolonial newly independent nations had to become nation-states in which the territoriality of the nation was coterminous with that of the state. Following a worldwide wave of decolonization in the mid-twentieth

> century, the development of nation-states generated tensions with local solidarities in many parts of the world. The problem of state formation, nation building, or national integration has been widespread in the postcolonial world, as is demonstrated by references to "dual" and "plural" or "multiple" societies, to "mosaic" or "composite" social structures, to "states" that are not "nations" and "nations" that are not "states," to "tribalism," "parochialism," and "communalism." (17)

Zahra's father greedily views her body as a fertile site for manipulation, and his allegorized patriarchal power appropriates the territory of her body by making it into something it can never truly be. But her body cannot be refined in this, her ambiguity symbolizing the plural and mosaic societies that resist the pressure of trickle-down power structures. This is not an allegory for colonial powers usurping new territories, but rather one for the nation-state attempting to re-regulate the societal structures that survived colonialism. Her father thus represents the Maghrebi nation-state. As Charrad describes, "[a] state is thus an institution that places a claim on the authority to make binding decisions for all, on the monopoly of force, and on a territory" (18). Her father assumes this monopolizing force, and her body signifies the plurality of Moroccan tribal communities that he attempts to assimilate.

But Saunders' and Hayes' analyses do not extend into the acts that occur on the site of Zahra's assimilated body—namely, acts of sex and sexuality. If sex is intended to allegorize the power of the nation-state, neither scholar can accurately account for the sexual desires that sexual encounters provoke in Zahra. If her body is to be taken as the nation, and sex and rape are intended to represent violation, what can be made of her increasingly fervent desires? And if her body becomes Morocco in *L'Enfant de sable*, their claims do not account for either the nation, or

her territorial and allegorized body, as it appears in *La Nuit sacrée*. While my interrogation of the texts does not seek to further study Zahra's body as the site of nation-making, I nevertheless pick up where Saunders' and Hayes' powerful readings leave off by asking questions about the relationship between Zahra's body, her desire, and her subjectivity.

2.2 THE BODY AND MISOGYNY

Abbes Maazaoui's ultimate project aims to connect Ben Jelloun's narrative and descriptive techniques with the imagery of Zahra's body. Maazaoui focuses on the portrayal of her female form within both texts, although his reading exposes the misogyny and tragedy of Zahra's womanhood while leaving unexplored the sexuality that is both experienced by and directed at her body. His work closely follows the construction of the image of the female form, a reading that this chapter builds upon by also uncovering the desires provoked by its ambiguities.

Like Saunders and Hayes, Maazoui's analysis is well-warranted. Charrad pinpoints the controversy of the female figure in Magrebi households, just by virtue of their very existence, by describing the Moroccan laws that permit child-brides and legal guardianship that men hold over their wives, at times even after divorce. Writing of the value of *ird*, a quality of family honor that rests with the moral purity of the women in a man's family, she explains

> Family reputation depends on the virginity of daughters and sisters, the fidelity of wives, and the continence of widowed and divorced daughters and sisters […] Sometimes, much less than sexual transgression may entail a loss of ird. A challenge may be enough. Even though the woman may have done nothing to

> encourage the advances of a man, such advances in themselves affect the honor of the kin group. (63)

Zahra's femaleness, a state that she ultimately chooses upon discarding her failed maleness, helps construct her abjection because it is for this reason that her father rejects her original biology. She is abject initially for being female, secondly for her ambiguity, and finally for returning to her femaleness. Indeed, in the final scenes of *La Nuit sacrée*, her sisters mutilate her vagina in a symbolic attempt to shun her femaleness and her female desires.

2.3 THE BODY ABJECT

My discussion traces the evolution of Zahra and her sex identity from *L'Enfant de sable* into *La Nuit sacrée*, uniting the sex and sexuality present in both texts in investigation of Zahra's own desire. Rather than considering Zahra's metaphorical purpose, I am interested in revealing the links between abjection, sexuality and her personhood throughout her textual lifespan. *L'Enfant de sable* thus serves as the model by which I analyze *La Nuit sacrée*. Over the course of my close reading, I establish that the desire motivated by Zahra's abjective nature in the former text motorizes her heterosexuality in the latter text, as she, too, sees sex where she sees suffering. The non-normative properties that characterize her early sexuality shape the woman into which she evolves.

Central to Zahra's development as a subjectivity is a series of sexual encounters that ultimately reveal she and her suitors share a sexual orientation that has no object other than the abject. The experiences are similar in action and in person, a chain of repeating and reiterating events that reinforce Zahra's orientation. The sum of these experiences, in which Zahra

functions both as the object of desire and as a desiring subject, eventually results in her personhood, a conclusion I reach by mapping Donna Haraway's theories of the cyborg onto Zahra's sexual encounters and sexual self-exploration. Judith Butler's claims of interpellation and attraction in *Undoing Gender* are also key theoretical instruments in this analysis. Zahra's liminality renders her illegibile as a human figure; unproblematized humanity relies upon intelligible gender and behavior that conforms to socially regulated gender norms. Yet, as I demonstrate per Butler's claims, desire for Zahra, in the shape of either auto-eros or as lust from another party, reinstates that legibility despite her ambiguity. Zahra ultimately comes to recognize herself via abjective self-exploration and the disgusted desire she elicits.

The following discussion follows a trajectory of the abject/deject/subject relationship. The initial focus, and main analysis, of this chapter relates to the Zahra we meet in *L'Enfant de sable*. Here, I establish Zahra's position within my proposed model of abjection in the text; she is not only repulsive, but magnetic and liminal. I then discuss Zahra's status as a transient deject in relation to Kristeva's conceptions of the deject within abjection, as social and familial refusal of Zahra forces her to wander in search of hers womanhood. The subsequent section concentrates on the production of a subjectivity, generated by attention to abjection, before I go on to interrogate Zahra's abjective sexual preference in *La Nuit sacrée*, thus identifying the roots of this abjective lust in *L'Enfant de sable*.

2.3.1 The Abject Daughter

Kristeva's claims of abjection in *Powers of Horror* delineate that the abject cannot definitely be separated from the self. It is not opposite from the self ("The abject is not an object facing me, which I name or imagine" [1]), but rather a discarded part of the self that

delineates the boundaries that define and disconnect it from all else. Precisely because the abject is a somehow rejected part of a body or identity, although fearful or repulsed by its presence, we cannot turn away from it. She calls the abject "[t]he fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from [it]" (2). This severance reassures us that we are not also the abject, and being drawn to it is designed to stimulate such reassurance. Viewing excreted bodily waste is thus a necessity, as it simultaneously sustains and threatens life:

> My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls behind the limit–*cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object. (3)

Pursuing and fearing the abject generates its existence. We thus *create* the abject as the abject *creates* the object, the border.

Zahra's abjection is rooted in such a chain of production. Her father created a daughter, an expulsion from his own body, and greatly fears her femaleness as it forms the border between his maleness and "woman." Thus even before her birth, Zahra instigates abjective upheaval. As if predicting her biology, her father recognizes that he cannot bear another daughter in his household. Females repel him, as he claims when speaking of his first seven daughters:

> Sept, c'était trop, c'était même tragique. Que de fois il se remémora l'histoire des Arabes d'avant l'Islam qui enterraient leurs filles vivantes! Comme il ne pouvait s'en débarasser, il cultivait à leur égard non pas de la haine, mais de l'indifférence.

> Il vivait à la maison comme s'il n'avait pas de progéniture. Il faisait tout pour les oublier, pour les chasser de sa vie. (17)

His hatred for his daughters erases their existence.

Later, by signifying his current daughters as corpses, the father indicates that he views them as "the corpse, the most sickening of wastes," such a "border then encroaches upon everything." Their existence has encroached upon his maleness, his fatherhood, and his masculinity, and the sperm he used in their creation is signified as bodily waste. Their abjection becomes his eventual terror at fathering another girl. Not only does he fear his eighth daughter before she even exists, he claims to identify flaws inherent to femaleness that account for his wife's failure to give him a son:

> [j]'ai compris que tu portes en toi une infirmité; ton ventre ne peut concevoir d'enfant mâle; il est fait de telle sorte qu'il ne donnera–à perpétuité–que des femelles. Tu n'y peux rien. Ça doit être une malformation, un manque d'hospitalité qui se manifeste naturellement. (21)

Misogyny laces his despair; his wife's reproductive organs are broken machines that ruin embryos by rendering them female. He fears therefore not only social femaleness, but biological, anatomical femaleness, as well, dreading all women as he dreads his daughter.

In *La Nuit sacrée*, as Zahra's father explains his strange decision to her, he confirms a fear of her mother so great that he once wished to cast her from his consciousness:

> Il faut que je te dise combien j'ai haï ta mère. Je ne l'ai jamais aimée. Je sais qu'il t'est arrivé de te demander si entre ton père et ta mère il y eut de l'amour? […] Non, même pas la tendresse. Il m'arrivait d'oublier complètement son existence, son nom, sa voix. (27)

So terrified is Zahra's father of another replica of his wife's loathsome womanhood that he can conceive of only one strategy by which he might stifle her abjection; he must raise the final child as a son. A male child cures the abject shame of being a son-less father. As Kristeva situates the corpse at the border between subject and object, a child with a penis, a son, ensures the existence and proliferation of the family and therefore represents life and futurity. If the border is the corpse, the penis is life-preserving protection from the border. Furthermore, the penis, even the falsified penis, reiterates the father's malehood. He is able to ascribe his maleness onto his daughter, preserving himself, if temporarily, from the abject corpse of a daughter that will always be dead to him.

Naming the baby Ahmed before he is even certain of its biological sex reinforces the terror her father feels at the prospect of another daughter: "[l]'enfant que tu mettras au monde sera un mâle, il s'appelera Ahmed, même si c'est une fille!" (*Enfant* 23). And when Ahmed is born, her father fully invests in protecting himself from her harmful vagina by describing a penis so developed it belongs on the body of a grown man. He proclaims to his wife: "Tu viens après quinze ans de donner un enfant, c'est un garçon, c'est mon premier enfant, regarde comme il est beau, touche ses petits testicules, touche son pénis, *c'est déjà un homme*!" (26).[16] Detailing the size of an imaginary member overcompensates for an organ that does not exist, an unreal, penile weapon designed by Zahra's father to protect him from her dangerous vagina. His daughter's femaleness imperils his own masculinity within a culture that associates women with divisiveness and evil (Charrad 51).

The father carefully draws attention once again to Zahra's imaginary penis, this time cutting his own finger during her "circumcision" so that blood visibly spurts, creating a metaphor

[16] Emphasis mine.

for ejaculation and supporting the idea that his son has a big penis: "Figurez-vous qu'il a présenté au coiffeur-circonciseur son fils, les jambes écartées, et que quelque chose a été effectivement coupé, que le sang a coulé, éclaboussant les cuisses de l'enfant et le visage du coiffeur" (*Nuit* 32). Ben Jelloun carefully depicts the father's construction of his child's false penis. Again, the abject vagina is a part of the father, as he sheds his own blood during the ceremony to give life to Ahmed.

And yet, as Abbes Maazaoui has accurately pinpointed, *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée* contain precious little description of the female form, even as Zahra's adult body experiences masturbation and eventually rape:

> [I]l est remarquable qu'il ne fasse pas l'objet d'une intense activité descriptive. Loin d'être nombreux et longs, les portraits de femmes dans les deux romans sont plutôt courts et relativement rares. Autant le corps y est présent comme objet de narrations et de fabulations, autant il en est absent comme objet de description. (70)

Her father's abundant description of her false penis stands in contrast to Ben Jelloun's lack of description of her actual body. Ben Jelloun is almost reductive in his expression of Zahra's physicality, occasionally identifying only her vagina, her small breasts, and her anus. Using such a narrative technique reinforces the fear that her father feels for her, as he essentializes her to the anatomical pieces that frighten him (female breasts and a vagina) while re-conceptualizing her, armed with the false penis.

Through his rejection of his daughter's femaleness, Kristeva's claims of abjection fall into place. Zahra's vagina frightens and disgusts him, and though he experiences no sexual attraction to his child, he finds nevertheless that he needs this daughter, for it is only through her that he

can simulate the existence of a son. The pleasure of having a male child replaces the erotic component of abjective attraction, seducing her father by promising him social status. The public birth announcement acts as a published *jouissance*:

> Dieu est clément. Il vient d'illuminer la vie et le foyer de votre serviteur et dévoué potier Hadj Ahmed Souleïmane. Un garçon—que Dieu le protège et lui donne longue vie—est né jeudi à 10h. Nous l'avons nommé Mohamed Ahmed. Cette naissance annonce fertilité pour la terre, paix et prospérité pour le pays. Vive Ahmed! Vive le Maroc! (30)

Most of the announcement is performative utterance and cannot be proven true or false. His public proclamation that his wife bore a son named Ahmed performs the social and cultural baptism of the child as male.

Charrad, writing of the role of the woman and the family unit in the Maghrebi household reminds that "The principle of community–or basis for solidarity–traditionally has been anchored in the bonds connecting male members of the same paternal lineage […] The socially meaningful ties unifying the network thus bind men together and bypass women" (53).[17] The weight of this public announcement cannot therefore be underestimated. It promotes that the household now has a son, and more importantly promises that this newest child was not a girl.

Anne McClintock would agree. As she points out, it is males that are imprinted with national agency: "Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit […] Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to

[17] Though the time period during which *L'Enfant de sable* takes place is unclear, it is worth noting that Morocco's Code of Personal Status law, the *Mudawwanna* enacted in 1957 and 1958, strongly favored the agnatic kinship system. Thus, familial law as well as legal decree favor the father and the patrilineal line.

national agency" (354). A father with only daughters perpetually relies on his sons-in-law. Zahra's father refuses to succumb to that trap, and his son's birth becomes allegory for his own personhood as well as Morocco's nationhood.

The father's false and failed agency is impotent without his jubilant "Vive Ahmed! Vive le Maroc!", for it allegorizes not only the life of a new son, but also the life of the burgeoning nation-state of Morocco. Saunders astutely concludes that this announcement, critical to the unraveling of the plot of *L'Enfant de sable*, represents the Ahmed's link to the body politic:

> Not only does this announcement inaugurate the figural association of Ahmed with Morocco, but it suggests that fertility, peace and the prosperity of the country are contingent upon the birth of sons, that the destiny of the country rests in men's hands. It thus founds both the novel's analogy between sexual and political liberation—Ahmed's attempts to decolonize the body and Moroccans' efforts to decolonize the body politic—and its implicit interrogation of masculinist nationalisms. (139)

Proclaiming the arrival of a son thus reinforces the process that Zahra's father has initiated. Her body colonized by the imposition of maleness, she will ultimately mirror Morocco's own struggle for resistance against the French protectorate. Saunders goes on to claim that:

> [t]he transgendered narrative space of *L'Enfant de sable* not only thickens the novel's admixture of body and narrative, but emphasizes that a nation, like the body, never exists as *res extensa*, that it is an always narrativized and practiced surface perpetually becoming the significance inscribed on it. (139)

And this practice of the body must be orchestrated in harmony with gender, for the territory of the body is just as disputed as that of the land. Like Saunders, McClintock sees the power

struggle of gender as a precursor to disputes over power in the context of the nation: "Nationalism is thus constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power" (355).[18]

Zahra's father becomes wearily aware of this truth of gender power. The condition of maleness inscribed upon the body of his daughter is temporary, and he senses that the economy of gender power in Morocco will eventually reclaim Zahra's "territory." The father finds himself forced to love a son that ultimately terrifies him for this reason, recalling in *La Nuit sacrée* that

> Apparemment je continuais d'être ce que j'étais: un riche commerçant comblé par cette naissance. Mais au fond, dans mes nuits solitaires, j'étais confronté à l'image insupportable du monstre. Oh ! j'allais et je venais, normalement, mais à l'intérieur le mal ruinait ma santé morale et physique. Le sentiment du péché, puis la faute, puis la peur. Je portais tout cela en moi. Une charge trop lourde. (26)

He loathes having raised his son as a daughter, as he claims, but more accurately he laments the existence of an eighth daughter forcing him to manipulation and deceit. He is not "comblé" by her birth; it tortures him. "L'image insupportable du monstre" is his daughter, Ahmed. On his death bed, he tells her, "[t]oi, je t'ai aimée autant que j'ai haï les autres. Mais cet amour était lourd, impossible" (*Nuit* 27), clarifying that his love for her was never joyful, that she repelled him even as he drew near to her.

Zahra's self-loathing for her femaleness begins here, during a childhood with a man who created her in abject love, eventually experiencing an adolescent state of an abjective self-desire.

[18] Again, while I certainly agree with McClintock's conclusions, this hegemony of gender power does extend to the power of desire that rampages Zahra's body throughout *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*.

Maazaoui divides this time into three stages that textually define and describe "l'évolution du corps féminin, l'enfance, l'adolescence (69)" and a complex post-adolescent stage. In the former, she learns the social and cultural rules intended to make her legible as Ahmed to her family and community:

> La première étape correspond à l'enfance et se caractérise par un conditionnement physique destiné à renforcer chez la victime une 'conscience de sexe' et une connaissance immédiate des règles régissant les rapports entre hommes et femmes. Ainsi il s'agit pour elle d'apprendre quel sexe doit un respect absolu à l'autre. (69)

Maazaoui continues that as a teen, Zahra's pubescent body becomes not only a challenge, but a betrayal to her father: "Ainsi les seins semble un phénomène irrépressible…Mais que faire des règles? Surtout quel remède pourrait-il jamais empêcher l'apparition du désir? Comment le réprimer et surtout comment le satisfaire quand on est une femme?" (69). Maazoui is correct that her body can no longer conform to the standards imposed upon it by her father: "Le développement de la sexualité coïncide donc avec une répression grandissante du désir avec une violence dirigée contre le corps" (69). I further this claim by insisting that Zahra's biological resistance forms the abjective context of her eventual masturbation. As her body and her desires develop, a self-hatred emerges upon her realization that she has no control over the criminality (per Saunders) of a maleness shaded with female characteristics. Zahra's puberty violates her passing maleness, and the ensuing ambiguity of her gender expression violates social law.

Initially, Zahra develops an aversion to the sight of female genitals. Even as a young child, she understands enough about her own anatomy to dread what may become of her vagina. Accompanying her mother to the baths, the sight of the naked female form inspires a feeling of

filth in Zahra: "Lorsque ma mère me savonnait, elle était étonnée de constater combien j'étais sale" (35). The bodies of these women repulse her:

> Après j'avais tout le temps pour me promener comme un diable entre les cuisses de toutes les femmes. J'avais peur de glisser et tomber. Je m'accrochais à ces cuisses étalées et j'entrevoyais tous ces bas-ventres charnus et poilus. Ce n'était pas beau. C'était même dégoûtant. (36)

Frightened by adult vaginas, she actually fears stumbling into one. Upon returning home, Zahra carefully self-inspects as a measure of reassuring that her vagina has not become likewise deformed: "Je me cachais le soir pour regarder dans un petit miroir de poche mon bas-ventre: il n'y avait rien de décadent; une peau blanche et limpide, douche au toucher, sans plis, sans rides" (36). This reassurance is neither adequate nor durable, and Zahra knows that her pre-pubescent vagina will eventually repulse her: "Alors, j'évite les miroirs. Je n'ai pas toujours le courage de me trahir, c'est-à-dire de descendre les marches que mon destin a tracées et qui me mènent au fond de moi-même dans l'intimité–insoutenable–de la vérité qui ne peut pas être dite" (44). But in fact, the *vérité* cannot remain unspoken for long because she can only tolerate its burden when she speaks of it, lamenting that "[l]a vérité s'exile; il suffit que je parle pour que la vértié s'éloigne, pour qu'on l'oublie, et j'en deviens le fossoyeur et le déterreur, le maître et l'esclave" (45). Speaking the truth is cathartic, especially within her journal, but viewing the truth–perceiving her genitals or her womanhood in the mirror–is too painful.

Soon, even avoiding the mirror is no longer enough, and menstruation becomes a means of her ugly womanhood leaking from her body. Zahra calls the appearance of her first period a "résistance du corps au nom; éclaboussure d'une circonsion tardive. C'était un rappel, une

grimace d'un souvenir enfoui, le souvenir d'une vie que je n'avais pas connue et qui aurait pu être la mienne" (46). She feels diseased and recalls:

> [j]e sentais le besoin de me géurir de moi-même, de me décharger de cette solitude lourde telle une muraille receuillant les plaintes et les cris d'une horde abandonnée, une mosquée dans le désert, où les gens du crépuscule viennent déposer leur tristesse et offrir un peu de leur sang. (46)

She imagines that puberty can kill her, a "sorte de fatalité, une trahision de l'ordre" (48), her burgeoning breasts capable of stifling her: "J'imaginais des seins qui pousserait à l'intérieur rendant ma respiration difficile" (48). Zahra believes that a sickness swells inside her, the symptoms of which being these developing female sex organs. Saunders sees evidence of the nation in Zahra's malady: "Gender nonconformity, as Ahmed recognizes, is perceived as sickness (as indeed 'gender identity disorder' is, in US medicine, classified as a mental illness') or, like criminality, as a more willful deviation from normality" (140). Zahra thus recognizes that her body's abjection is not just related to its blurred boundaries of gender, but also to the social crimes committed by obscuring such boundaries.

Zahra identifies the abjection in her body as not only repulsive and abhorrent, but dangerous and violent. Her self-hatred does not dissipate and occurs not in spite of her abjective self-perception, but rather because of it. Abjective self-erotics lace her first masturbatory experience with discomfort and desire:

> Dans les bras endoloris de mon corps, je me tiens, je descends au plus profond comme pour m'évader. Je me laisse glisser dans une ride et j'aime l'odeur de cette vallée. Je sursaute au cri de la jument envoyée par l'absent. Elle est blanche et je

me cache les yeux. Mon corps lentement s'ouvre à mon désir. Je le prends par la main. Il résiste. La jument cavale. Je m'endors, enlacé par mes bras. (54)

Taken from her personal diary, the private discussion by which Zahra tolerates her self-loathing, these lines reveal that Zahra's initial erotic self-exploration, the stimulation of her breasts and her vagina, occurs while she continues to perceive herself as Ahmed, as evidenced by the adjective *enlacé*. Abjective magnetism is undeniably present; Zahra tries to escape her own embrace. The imagery of the mare indicates that she perceives her desire to be bestial, dirty and inhuman. Zahra's own aching arms become the very arms that cradle her after her first masturbation scene, directly engaging "mon désir," her genitals, "par la main" (58). Maazaoui sees Zahra's adolescences as a *fracture* between her father's manipulative wishes and the inevitable development of Zahra's own body. Her father's desire for a son pulls her in one direction, the rules of biology pulling her in another. Though he does not develop the violence that he sees regarding Zahra's self-desire, he does astutely interpret that "[l]e développement de la sexualité coïncide donc avec une repression grandissante du désir et avec une violence dirigée contre le corps" (69). Zahra's abjective reaction to self-stimulation therefore results from a lifetime of knowing that her body would eventually betray her.

Though the death of her father becomes Zahra's ultimate impetus for transition from man to woman, her self-love is the first step in a journey toward joining the fragmented segments of a fractured subjectivity. Judith Butler claims in *Undoing Gender* that desirability is inseparable from legibility: "a criterion that posits coherent gender as a presupposition of humanness, is not only one which, justly or unjustly, governs the recognizability of the human, but one that informs the ways we do or do not recognize ourselves at the level of feeling, desire, and the body" (58). Recognizing within another a worthiness of being desired forges an interpellation that calls the

other into the realm of subjectivity–the object of desire transforms into a subject of its own. In Zahra's case, the desire that interpellates is activated by abjection, an erotic draw toward the repellant parts of her. The socially unlawful state of a liminal gender expression makes Zahra abjective; masturbation self-soothes, reminding her of her own human condition. Furthermore, masturbation represents an erotic fixation with her self-loathing that reiterates in more profound examples. Deserting her family after her father's death and adopting the name "Zahra," her self-stimulation increases in interest and intensity, and she finds that her obscure gender identity attracts unintended and unwanted sexual attention. Even through violence, the abjective draw toward Zahra contributes to the construction of her personhood, per Butler's claims of interpellative desire.

2.3.2 The Deject Daughter

Zahra's gender expression has been complicated by a childhood and early adulthood as Ahmed. At twenty years old, biologically an adult but just barely an adult socially and psychologically, she escapes her family and Ahmed by running away after her father dies, the next part of her life characterized by transience and movement. This abjection in motion can be represented by Kristeva's conception of *the deject*, the mobile abject:

> The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belong, or refusing. Situationist in a sense […] wishing to know his abjections is not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations…A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey,

> during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved. (8)

Zahra becomes the stray, the *deject*, abandoning Ahmed and her family as she attempts to uncover her womanhood *en route*:

> Alors je vais sortir. Il est temps de naître nouveau. En fait je ne vais pas changer mais simplement revenir à moi, juste avant que le destin qu'on m'avait fabriqué ne commence à se dérouler et ne m'emporte dans un courant.
>
> Sortir. Emerger de dessous la terre […] Je vais partir sans mettre de l'ordre, sans prendre de bagages, juste de l'argent et ce manuscrit, unique trace et témoin de ce que fut mon calvaire. (111)

The significance of Zahra's movement lies in that she does not merely choose to explore her female body; she intends to do it where no one will recognize her, and nowhere that she will remain long enough for anyone to remember her. She insists that it cannot be done without change in space: "Ma retraite n'a pas suffi; c'est pour cela que j'ai décidé de confronter ce corps à l'aventure, sur les routes, dans d'autres villes, dans d'autres lieux" (112.) Her gender expression is more complicated than ever; the mind of a man travels the streets within the body of a woman.

Twenty years of living as Ahmed has meant that Zahra's legibility is male, but before beginning her journey, she undoes the binding from her breasts, rendering her appearance liminal, transgressive, and confusing. Differently from the transgendered narrative of Western gender rhetoric, Zahra is eager to understand a biology that was always present but forbidden to examine. Aware of the drastic change in her form, she caresses her breasts and genitals, but

finds her touch to be revolting and violent: "J'ai enlevé les bandages autour de ma poitrine, j'ai longuement caressé mon bas-ventre. Je n'ai pas peu de plaisir ou, peut-être, j'ai eu des sensations violentes, comme des décharges électriques" (112). Launching a new life as a woman has not eased her self-loathing. Still compelled to masturbate, her body continues to repel her. Self-stimulation initiates a cycle; the more obscured her human condition, the more Zahra provokes the human physiological response of orgasm. This self-soothing mechanism reminds her and reassures her of her humanity, initiating a pattern of masturbation in response to sentiments of abjective self-loathing.

Maazaoui views Zahra's new womanhood as "l'acquisition par la victime du droit d'être elle-même, c'est-à-dire d'avoir un corps de femme. Cette conquête du corps prend en premier lieu la forme d'une délivrance qui consiste pour l'héroïne à pouvoir enlever les seins et le bas-ventre" (69). He perceives a tactile liberation that frees her feminine body from "le rejet du voile et des vêtements" et serves as an "apprentissage de la féminité [qui] dépend enfin de la reconnaissance du corps en tant que sujet désirant" (70). He correctly observes that Zahra's self-recognition as a desiring subject is key to her self-development and to the courage it requires to leave her family, but Zahra's corporeal self-awareness is much more complicated than a simple rejection of the veil. Simple masturbation prior to departure does not easily indicate that she is now a legible and "passable" woman, and if anything, masturbation complicates her realization of just how ambiguous she will soon be to those she encounters.

In this ambiguous form—the mind of a man, a socially male intelligibility, and the revitalized body of a woman—Zahra travels. Others perceive her as *l'homme aux seins de femme*, the title of the chapter that showcases the initial stages of her journey. The itinerant abject cannot go far without immediately drawing attention to herself, her abjection increasingly

legible. She first encounters an old beggar woman who bars Zahra's passage of an alley way: "Elle me barrait le passage. Ce n'était pas difficile. Il suffisait de se mettre en travers et d'étendre un peu les bras, comme pour retenir les murs" (113). The old woman's blockage of the alley signifies the confrontations that Zahra must make regarding the legibility of her new body, confronting the difficult reality that showcasing her female body may mean abandoning the identity and gender expression of Ahmed.

The old woman first carefully scrutinizes the curious human in front of her, finding Zahra's body disturbing and erotic:

> De toute façon la vieille se doutait de quelque chose. Son regard n'avait rien d'innocent. Il scrutait, déshabillait, mettait à l'épreuve: il savait tout en doutant. Il cherchait une confirmation. Il vérifiait et s'impatientait. La question revint avec le même ton autoritaire. (113)

Zahra's self-loathing can be read on her body, exciting the beggar, whose interrogation of Zahra pinpoints that she has identified the traveler's abjective hybridity and whose erotic desire for Zahra increases over the course of their dialogue. "Que caches-tu sous ta djelalba," the woman demands, "un homme ou une femme, un enfant ou un vieillard, une colombe ou une rue araignée?" (113). Zahra's responds, "[t]u sais bien qui je suis," reinforcing the old woman's accurate identification of her abjective hybridity. Here, the beggar woman announces that such ambiguity is precisely what she seeks, her lust and her curiosity aroused by the abjective properties of Zahra's illegible appearance: "Je ne veux pas de nom, je désire l'invisible, ce que tu caches, ce que tu emprisonnes dans ta cage thoracique" (114). Zahra claims that she does not know, but that she has "le corps labouré de blessures et de cicatrices […] et pourtant un corps qui a peu vécu" (113), illustrating the hatred she feels for a body she does not yet understand and

igniting the beggar's desire. These cascading ambiguities in morphology and desire that surface here highlight Zahra's illegibility and point toward her queerness.

Zahra complies with her demand to reveal her body; the old woman meets the exposure with a face "illuminé par un éclair troublant où se mêlaient le désir et l'étonnement" (114). Unable to restrain her desire any longer, she forces herself onto Zahra: "elle passa ses mains sur ma poitrine, approcha de moi sa tête et posa ses lèvres d'un bébé. Je me laissai faire puis réagis violemment, la repoussant de toutes mes forces" (114). The homeless condition of the beggar woman mirrors Zahra's liminal gender. She is intelligible as a human figure, but her transient state positions her within society's margins. Her lifestyle also relies upon movement and motion, just as Zahra's status as the deject requires her to be in motion. As Zahra's gender shifts, so does her location. The beggar's marginality responds to this realignment.

Zahra leaves the encounter aware that the old woman was drawn to her for the very reasons that she disgusts herself so. The beggar has perceived Zahra's humanity. The homeless woman's desire for her, mingled with her own brief sensations of desire arouse her. Appreciating this recognition, she masturbates, attempting to reproduce that recognition:

> La sensation physique que j'éprouvai aux caresses de cette bouche édentée sur mon sein fut, même si elle ne dura que quelques secondes, du plaisir. J'ai honte de l'avouer […] Je m'étendis sur le lit, nue, et essayai de redonner à mes sens le plaisir qui leur était défendu. Je me suis longement caressé les seins et les lèvres du vagin. J'étais bouleversée. J'avais honte. La découverte du corps devait passer par cette rencontre de mes mains et de mon bas-ventre. J'étais tout en sueur, je tremblais et je ne sais pas encore si j'avais du plaisir ou du dégoût. (115)

Zahra's reaction to the meeting triples the abjective desire within the interaction. Responding to the old woman's abjective draw toward her, she momentarily and curiously desires the woman in turn, a desire that provokes masturbation. Not knowing whether or not she experiences "plaisir ou dégoût" represents an archetype of abjective lust; her disgust arouses her, and her arousal disgusts her.

Jarrod Hayes sees this meeting as an erotic response to abjection on both parts. The beggar woman is pleasured by Zahra's ambiguous form. Hayes claims that "the erotics of this search" (167) arouse the woman as she attempts to peel back Zahra's gender in search of her sex. The lesbian feelings aroused by the interaction shame Zahra: "the proof of Ahmed's gender leads to another ambiguity, the possibility of lesbian desire. The passage hints at future repercussions of the incident. Lesbian pleasure elicits shame, embarrassment (the word 'honte' appears twice)" (167). Zahra feels disgust at the possibility of homosexuality.

Zahra's abjective hybridity seemingly serves as a call to those that desire it, and circus owner Oum Abbas, a stranger to Zahra, seeks her out: "Elle était venue me chercher comme si elle avait été envoyée par quelqu'un" (117). Like the beggar woman, Oum Abbas owns a traveling circus and thus shares Zahra's transience. Zahra is the deject, her status as a stray coloring her environment with abjection. Oum Abbas likewise inhabits the margins in which the homeless woman resides, the margins in which Zahra, too, now lives. Indeed, Oum Abbas claims that she has known of Zahra for sometime, somehow drawn to her by her abjection: "Un des compagnons du Prophète m'a mis sur tes pas. Cela fait longtemps que je suis à ta recherche. Ne dis rien. Laisse-moi deviner ta parole" (117). Just as Zahra insisted that the old beggar woman recognized her, Oum Abbas leans into Zahra's face and tells her: "Je te connais" (118). Zahra acknowledges that Oum Abbas' erotic attention calls to her, a Butlerian interpellation,

signifying the future to her, and she wonders, "Je ne feignis même pas de résister, pouvais-je échapper à cet appel? Était-ce possible de contourner le destin? Et puis, peut-être cela, le début de l'aventure" (118). "Tu vas me suivre!" (118) demands Oum Abbas, a command significant in its instruction that Zahra continue to travel, to change place and follow Oum Abbas, fortifying her status as the wandering deject.

Oum Abbas, stimulated that she is *en route* with Zahra, succumbs to desire in almost the same manner as the old beggar woman, unable to continue without forcing herself upon Zahra. She acknowledges Zahra's personhood by demonstrating her arousal for her:

> Je la suivis en silence. Arrivée à une ruelle sombre, elle me coinça contre le mur et se mit à me fouiller. Je compris vite qu'elle ne cherchait ni argent ni bijoux. Ses mains tâtaient mon corps comme pour vérifier une intuition. Ma poitrine minuscule ne la rassura point, elle glissa sa main sur mon séroual et la laissa un instant sur mon bas-ventre, puis introduisit son médium dans mon vagin. (118)

That Oum Abbas groped Zahra "pour vérifier une intuition" reinforces the model of abjective desire established in this chapter. Zahra's anomalous gender expression arouses her and Oum Abbas forces Zahra to indulge her excitement rooted in uncertainty. Oum Abbas explains to Zahra her sudden desire by holding her down and declaring, "[j]'avais une doute" (118). Zahra's response fortifies the very ambiguous abjection that has aroused Oum Abbas: "Moi aussi! dis-je entre les lèvres" (118). Further, Oum Abbas replicates the desire for Zahra's hybrid gender expression that is initially seen in the beggar woman. She also views Zahra as irresistible and cannot refrain from attempting to connect with Zahra sexually.

Jarrod Hayes identifies critical repetitions between the beggar woman and Oum Abbas, as well, insisting that just as the beggar woman verified Zahra's sex by suckling her developed

breast, Oum Abbas most literally "points out" Zahra's vagina (in Hayes' close reading, he refers to Zahra as Ahmed even after she begins her journey of self-exploration). He explains:

> When Oum Abbas's finger finds Ahmed's vagina, there is no longer a doubt concerning his/her womanhood. But for this interpretation to be valid, the vagina must be understood as the essence of womanhood; Oum Abbas puts her finger on exactly what makes Ahmed a woman. (168)

Oum Abbas thus not only repeats, but concludes the research initiated by the homeless woman.

The probing lesbian relationship is not the only matter to reproduce itself. The transience of homelessness is also reiterated in the forum of the circus. Nomadic circus life showcases not simply the abjection and mobile deject status of Zahra, but also the interpellation possible through the desire experienced for her abjective gender expression. First, the circus community reinforces Zahra's hatred of her abjective body and gender expression when she concludes that she belongs there. She sees herself as a circus freak: "J'étais intriguée et fascinée. J'émergeais lentement mais par secousses à l'être que je devais devenir" (121). Futher, Oum Abbas and her son, Abbas, hire Zahra to replace Malika, the troupe's the bearded lady, who is, in fact, a man who performs as a woman. Malika:

> avait une barbe de quelques jours et une superbe moustache qui tombait sur des lèvres où le rouge vif avait mal été mis […] [O]n voyait bien que sa poitrine était faite avec des chiffons mal ajustés…Et pourtant personne n'était dupe. Malika était bien un homme. Il y avait quelque chose d'étrange et en même temps de familier: une complicité unissait tout ce monde. (120)

She sees herself not just in Malika's gender performance, but also in the weaknesses in that performance's facade. Just as Malika's false breasts are an obvious artifice and appear freakish

on her male body, so too do Zahra's biological breasts appear out of place. Malika leaves the circus to nourish his personal life ("[s]a femme l'a menacé de le quitter" (121)) in the same way that Zahra's enthusiastically joins the circus in order to nourish hers, gladly recalling "[j]e ne saurais peut–être rien de cette 'famille d'artistes' mais j'espérais beaucoup en savoir plus sur moi-même. Je n'avais pas d'appréhension. Au contraire, je jubilais, heureuse, légère, rayonnante" (123).

Abbas reminds Zahra that her abjection must be mobile, not merely supporting but even prolonging her status as the deject. He insists that her own complicated gender performance must be reiterated and represented on stage for the arousal of male patrons:

> Nous sommes des nomades, notre vie a quelque chose d'exaltant, mais elle est pleine d'impassesm […] [T]u te déguiseras en homme à la première partie du spectacle, tu disparaîtras cinq minutes pour réapparaître en femme fatale […] Il y a de quoi rendre fou tous les hommes de l'assistance. Ça va être excitant. (121)

Himself drawn to the abjection of a confused and confusing gender expression, to a male psychology in a woman's body, Abbas capitalizes on the abjective eroticism of Zahra's history. Like the beggar woman and his mother, he simply has access to Zahra's past, immediately perceiving her multi-gendered lived experiences. His desire and the desires of the male audience interpellate Zahra, who in turn acknowledges that this performance will permit her to "savoir plus sur moi-même" (123). Their lust for her symbolizes recognition of her personhood, the venue of the circus performer allegorizing the chaos of her gender expression and the social and cultural margins in which she resides. Zahra's replacement of the bearded lady symbolizes her own liminal gender, but it is her work as a performer that permits her body elicit desire and reinforce her humanness.

2.3.3 Pieces of Zahra

Until this stage in *L'Enfant de sable*, Zahra's story is told by a *raconteur*, a storyteller who claims to have possession of her personal journal in which she delineates her strange life. He has disappeared, and the novel contains no more definitive information about her. The three *fidèles* to Zahra's story, aged trio Salem, Amar and Fatouma, each take turns finishing the tale and claiming to have insider information about what has become of her. Each storyteller uses abjection to describe what has become of Zahra.

Salem, a black man from Senegal, begins, claiming that he has special access to abjective sex and desire as he once lived among a family such as Zahra's in which transgressive erotics were commonplace. He explains that:

> [j]'ai vécu et travaillé dans une grande famille semblable à celle que nous a décrite le conteur. Il n'y avait que des filles, et de temps en temps, un vague cousin, que la nature n'a pas privilégié, un nain, venait à la maison. Il restait plusieurs jours sans sortir. Les filles s'amusaient beaucoup. On les entendait tout le temps rire et on ne savait pas pourquoi. En fait, le nain avait un immense appétit sexuel. Il venait les satisfaire l'une après l'autre et repartait avec de l'argent et des cadeaux. (137)

Incest between cousins and between sisters drawn to the dwarf's unusual disability characterizes such a scenario as especially abject. Armed with these qualifications, Salem's story reiterates Zahra's abjective magnetism.

In this version, abjective desire flourishes in the relationship that Abbas shares with his mother and results in the final, most abjectively violent and perverse reaction to Zahra's gender expression yet. Though Salem's text differs from that of fellow storytellers' Amar and Fatouma,

each ending offers tools useful for reading Zahra's re-emergence in *La Nuit sacrée* and the abjective desires that motivate her sexual agency. I interpret them as the components of an amalgamated ending that point us in the direction of Zahra's textual future. In other words, these figures form biographical avatars that each supply crucial details that comprise Zahra's eventual subjectivity in *La Nuit sacrée*.

Salem identifies the violence and the lust that circulate between Oum Abbas and her child:

> Il dormait souvent dans le même lit qu'elle, posant la tête entre ses seins. On dit qu'il n'avait jamais été sevré du sein, et que sa mère avait continué de l'allaiter jusqu'à un âge avancé, bien au-delà de la puberté. Sa mère l'aimait avec violence. Elle le battait avec une canne cloutée et lui disait qu'il était son homme, son unique home. (141)

Profoundly aroused by his incestuous relationship with his mother, Abbas can turn only to Zahra's abjective body as a release. Flirtations with the mother he hates augment his desire for Zahra, as he can subject her to his repulsion and lust in ways in which he cannot harm Oum Abbas: "Elle se levait et montait sur son fils qui la prenait et tournait ainsi dans la chambre. Le fils bandait comme un taureau, déposait la mère et courait se soulager dans la nature, derrière une roulotte, de préférence celle où dormait Zahra" (141). Desperate to relieve himself of the lust he feels for the mother he desires and hates, Abbas assaults Zahra, whom he has imprisoned out of his disgust for her hybridity: "[Zahra] n'était plus un homme; elle n'était plus une femme, mais une bête de cirque" (142). The erotic dynamic of incest defies social and legal code. As Zahra's hybrid gender is also forbidden, Abbas finds her to be a logical outlet for the prohibited desires provoked by his mother.

Abbas' rape of Zahra represents the abjection and confusion that has motorized his lust, intentionally emphasizing the ambiguity of her gender expression by belittling her female genitals and breasts and sodomizing her. He focuses his desire and rage on the ungendered anus:

> Son séroual était ouvert, d'une main tenait son sexe, de l'autre un couteau. Il hurlait, demandait à Zahra de se laisser faire: "Par derrière, imbécile, donne-moi ton cul, c'est tout ce que tu possèdes, tu n'as pas de poitrine, et ton vagin ne m'inspire pas. Donne ton derrière…Ça va être ta fête. Tu fais ça toute seule, jevais t'apprendre comment on le fait à deux…"
>
> Il se jeta sur elle, mais, avant même de la pénétrer, il éjacula en poussant un râle rageur. Zahra reçut un coup de couteau dans le dos. Abbas sortit en la maudissant et s'en alla pleurer entre les seins de sa mère.
>
> Quelques instants après, il revint avec des menottes et attacha les bras de Zahra aux barreaux de la fênetre et la viola avec un vieux morceau de bois. (142)

Abbas' initial attack on Zahra enhances the way in which he perceives her abjection; he desires so much that his premature ejaculation prevents the assault he intends to commit. His own desire for her interrupts the attack, rendering Zahra especially loathsome. Only after Oum Abbas consoles him between her breasts, revitalizing his arousal for outlawed and non-normative sex, that Abbas returns to successfully rape her. His accusation of "possèdes" in reference to her anus accuses Zahra of the non-ownership of her sex organs, suggesting that her father's reappropriation of them positions them beyond her control.

Salem claims that Zahra dies during one of Abbas' fits of abjective desire and violence. As Abbas' disgust for Zahra increases, he imprisons her in a cage. Clients come no longer to see her perform, but simply to gaze at her, drawn by her abjection, often "crachaient de dégoût"

(142) upon her as they feed her peanuts. Oum Abbas sexually assaults regularly her as she bathes her: "elle la caressait, lui tâtait le sexe" (142). Aware of the augmented state of her abjection, now a prisoner as victim of sexual assault, Zahra awaits another rape at the hands of Abbas:

> Zahra eut l'intention qu'Abbas allair venir se jeter sur elle. Ses mains libres ramassèrent deux lames de rasoir jetées dans la cage par des spectateurs. Elle se déshabilla, mit les deux lames dans un chiffon qu'elle plaça en évidence entre ses fesses et attendit à plat ventre la visite de la brute…
>
> Zahra reçut comme une masse d'une tonne de corps d'Abbas qui eut la verge fendue. De douleur et de rage, il l'étrangla. Zahra mourut à l'aube étouffée, et le violeur succomba des suites de l'hémorragie. (143)

This death suggests not an ending to Zahra's life, but rather another beginning for her and a new textual directionality. Abjective desire does not kill her, instead permitting a new opportunity for transition, allowing her to re-emerge in *La Nuit sacrée* as an autonomous woman. Death represents the transition from *L'Enfant de sable* to the second text as metaphor for the Kristevan corpse, the corpse that "has encroached upon everything." In other words, the abjection latent in Zahra's hybrid form is at its most heightened state thus far in the text. Transition is the only resolution; Zahra cannot die and become the corpse itself for her body would thus become the abject, as her gender expression would die with her. She thus survives and the abject remains intact.

Zahra's death in Amar's ending similarly insinuates a twist in her story, rather than a dead end. And though Amar claims that Zahra died still living as Ahmed, home alone in her bedroom, he acknowledges that violence aroused by her ambiguous gender expression is necessary:

> Ce personnage est une violence en soi; son destin, sa vie sont de l'ordre de l'inconcevable. D'ailleurs, on ne peut même pas s'en tirer par une piroutte psychologique. Pour parler brutalement, vous en conviendrez, Ahmed n'est pas une erreur de la nature, mais un détournement social […] Enfin, je veux dire, ce n'est surtout pas un être attiré par le même sexe. Annulé dans ses désirs, je pense que seule une grande violence–un suicide plein de sang–peut apporter un terme à cette histoire. (160)

Through Salem's tale, we understand that Zahra is re-borne of abjective sexual transgression, desires that re-launch as her own in *La Nuit sacrée*. Amar's tale reinforces her heterosexuality as a female with a complex gender expression. Claiming that she is "surtout pas un être attiré par le même sexe" situates her within sexuality; her experiences in *La Nuit sacrée* reveal that she is no longer "annulé dans ses désirs," but rather liberated by them, in ownership of abjective sexuality.

Fatouma's version negates the stories of Salem and Amar by insisting that she is Zahra, that she has survived the trauma of shedding the persona of Ahmed and becoming a woman. This final ending confirms that Zahra emerges from her trauma intact, with the subjectivity of a heterosexual woman:

> Je ne suis qu'une femme […] J'ai vécu dans l'illusion d'un autre corps, avec les habits et les émotions de quelqu'un d'autre. J'ai trompé tout le monde jusqu'au jour où je me suis aperçue que je me trompais moi-même. Alors je me suis mise à regarder autour de moi et ce que j'ai vu m'a profondément choquée, bouleversée […] Il fallait quant à moi me débarrasser de ce que je fus, entrer dans l'oubli et liquider toutes les traces. (169)

At the end of *L'Enfant de sable*, we are left with three pieces of the puzzle created by Zahra's disappearance: that she is alive, that she is heterosexual, and that her personhood has developed via the abjective desire she instilled in others. Three distinct versions form the multiplicity and uncertainty of Zahra herself, each of them offering only a certain part of the narrative that we are able to trace into *La Nuit sacrée*. That Zahra lives provides the groundwork from which the second text is written, but her heterosexuality is undefined until *La Nuit sacrée* in which she gains autonomy and agency in her sexuality and the sexual acts in which she engages. Zahra re-emerges and, most importantly of all, the abjective desire she once provoked now her own instrument of desire and seduction. Interpellation forged a recognition of her humanity, and she, in turn, uses abjective desire in *La Nuit sacrée* as means of classifying the humanity within her lovers.

2.3.4 The Abject Lover

The erotic occurrences lived by Zahra always relate to the sexual pursuit of her disfigured gender expression, even within the context of her self-stimulation. Because such experiences ultimately forge the person that she becomes in *La Nuit sacrée*, I can draw an understanding of their significance from Donna Haraway's theories regarding the construction of "female consciousness" during the twentieth century. Haraway identifies the territory of lived social experience and fiction as belonging to the hybrid cyborg, a product of real and fictitious events. Zahra's exemplifies Haraway's cyborg; the fiction she lived as Ahmed and the reality she endures as Zahra emphasize that experiencing womanhood is far more about lived hybrid consciousness than biology. Haraway writes:

> A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction […] Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as a woman's experience in the late twentieth century. (149)

Zahra's social reality has been compromised by her fiction, and the abjectively sexual experiences of *L'Enfant de sable* construct a consciousness that permits her to re-emerge in *La Nuit sacrée*. Though once defaced by her hybridity, Zahra finds herself liberated by her ambiguously gendered experience. As a cyborg, ownership of her lived experiences releases her from the fixed status of the object and permits her to gain subjectivity. Zahra embodies "fiction and lived experience." Even her new autonomy constantly cites the machinization of the maleness forced upon her by her father. Her actions, delineated in the arguments below, repeatedly disconnect from that oppression.

Most relevant for my reading of *La Nuit sacrée* is Haraway's argument that the cyborg "is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-œdipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions […] In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense" (150). The cyborg is unintelligible—queer. Likewise, Zahra's cyborg status as a woman who lived as a man is profoundly post-gender. Her experiences with men and with women resist the Western categorization of bisexuality as none of them are motivated by object choice, or a desire for a specific set of genitals and gender expression. Abjection catalyzes the sexualized events that lead Zahra through *L'Enfant de sable*, the original background for the abjective lust she cultivates in *La Nuit sacrée*, and even in the earlier text exists evidence of a heterosexuality designed by abjective desire.

Heterosexuality is first understood by Zahra through the lens of heteronormativity within her immediate cultural context. While living as Ahmed, Zahra understands the Moroccan and Muslim cultural edicts of heterosexuality and marriage, though time spent with her father at the baths demonstrates for her that other desires exist: "J'appris plus tard qu'il se passait bien des choses dans ces coins sombres, que les masseurs ne faisaient pas que masser, que des rencontres et retrouvailles avaient lieu dans cette obscurité, et que tant de silence était suspect!" (*Enfant* 37). Aware of her gender expression, Zahra attempts to ensure that her false maleness arouses no suspicion by taking her epileptic cousin Fatima as a wife, adhering to the Maghrebi tradition of endogamous marriage. According to Charrad, "The rule of kin endogamy involves in particular the preference for marriage with the first paternal cousin. According to the rule, the preferred marriage for a man is, first, with his father's brother's daughter" (57).

But even within the Maghrebi-heteronormative parameters established by this rule of kinship and marriage, Zahra's tastes venture beyond normativity. Her intimate object choice is an abject choice:

> En optant pour la vie, j'ai accepté l'aventure. Et je voudrais aller jusqu'au bout de cette histoire. Je suis homme. Je m'appelle Ahmed selon la tradition de notre Prophète. Et je demande une épouse. Nous ferons une grande fête discrète pour les fiançailles. Père, tu m'as fait homme, je dois le rester. Et comme dit notre Prophète bien-aimé, "un musulman complet est un homme marié." (51)

The proposition horrifies her parents, each responding in a manner that fortifies the abjection visible in Zahra's gender expression: "Le père était dans un grand désarroi" (51). Her mother is even more troubled by the marriage, declaring, "Tu es un monstre!" (52).

Zahra's dedication to living as Ahmed twists her heterosexuality; not drawn to Fatima for personal or sexual reasons, she selects this future wife as a reflection of the self-loathing and pity she feels for herself. Fatima's broken form embodies Zahra's fractured self-identity. In her journal, Zahra writes about the draw she feels to Fatima's disfigured body. Though it is not sexual, Zahra already identifies within her a desire to be with one whom she finds abjective:

> Aujourd'hui, j'aime penser à celle qui deviendra ma femme. Je ne parle pas encore du désir, je parle de la servitude. Elle viendra, traînant une jambe, le visage crispé, le regard inquiet, bouleversée par ma demande. (58)

Even in *La Nuit sacrée*, Fatima appears to Zahra in a nightmare as abjective and repulsive:

> Je reconnus le corps de Fatima, la malheureuse cousine épileptique que j'avais épousée pour sauver les apparences et que j'aimais parce qu'elle était une déchirure béante et sur laquelle ne se posait aucune affection […] Elle gisait au fond de ce lac comme une vieille chose que personne ne veut. (*Nuit* 121)

After their marriage takes place, Zahra's affection for her cousin increases, and though she claims not to love Fatima's epilepsy or to feel erotic desire for her, it is for this ultimately fatal disability that gives her desirability as a wife:

> Ce que je ne pouvais aimer, c'était sa bouche qui se tordait au moment de la crise et qui gardait en elle un rictus comme une énorme virgule dans une page blanche. Son corps était ferme malgré sa jambe droite menue. Ferme et dur. Les seins était petits avec quelques poils autour du mamelon. Quand il m'arrivait de la serrer dans mes bras, pour la consoler de sa détresse, pas pour exprimer un quelconque désir sexuel, je sentais son corps réduit à une squelette. (*Enfant* 74)

Fatima's female form reflects Zahra's, both women described as slight and with small breasts. The unevenness in her gait represents Zahra's uneven social presentation. Fatima's illness also manifests in the form of blood, as Zahra's also has at her false circumcision and during her first menstruation. Fatima "avait souvent des hémorragies. Elle disait que son sang se fâchait et qu'elle n'était pas digne de le garder" (74). Conscious of Fatima's reiteration of her own disfigurement, Zahra's self-loathing reproduces in their relationship as she grows further aware of her reflection within her wife:

> La présence de Fatima me troublait beaucoup […] Cet être blessé à mes côtés, cette intrusion que j'avais installée moi-même […] cette femme courageuse et désespérée, qui n'était plus une femme, qui avait traversé un chemin pénible, ayant accepté de tomber dans un précipice, en défigurant son être intérieur, le masquant, l'amputant, cette femme qui n'aspirait même pas à être un homme, mais à être rien du tout […] C'était là mon miroir, ma hantise, et ma faiblesse. (77)

Zahra's attempt at heterosexuality as a male has failed, but such self-recognition establishes the pattern by which she eventually indulges her appetite for abjective lust. She wishes to meet her own abjection with the same qualities in her lovers.

Fatima, sensing Zahra's growing hatred of her and somehow learning that her husband is not a man, finds herself aroused by her husband's disfigured gender identity. Zahra laments that "elle glissa dans mon lit pendant que je dormais et doucement se mit à caresser mon bas-ventre" (80). Zahra's fury at being touched sexually by Fatima connects directly to the hatred she feels for her abjective state: "Je fus réveillé en sursaut et la repoussai violemment. J'étais furieux […] Je désirais sa mort. Je lui en voulais d'être infirme, d'être femme, et d'être là, par ma volonté, ma méchanceté, mon calcul et la haine de moi-même" (80). Still viewing herself as Ahmed,

adjectives like *réveillé* and *furieux* reveal that Zahra's shame stems from Fatima's touch where Zahra should have, but does not have, a penis.

Fatima confirms her role as the reproduction of Zahra's splintered identity moments before her death, telling Zahra:

> J'ai toujours su qui tu es, c'est pour cela, ma sœur, ma cousine, que je suis venue mourir ici, près de toi […] Nous sommes femmes avant d'être infirmes, ou peut-être nous sommes infirmes parce que femmes […] je sais notre blessure […] Elle est commune […] Je n'en vais […] Je suis ta femme et tu es mon épouse […] Tu seras veuf et moi […] disons que je fus une erreur. (80)

Calling Zahra both *veuf* and *épouse* recalls such splintering. She sees herself within Fatima's description and identifies with it.

It is here, upon Fatima's death, that her appetite for Zahra's abjection transfers to Zahra herself. Ben Jelloun implements the transmission of abjective desire from Fatima to Zahra in Fatima's request of her husband from beyond the grave: "Beaucoup plus tard, une voix venue d'ailleurs dira: 'Remange-moi, acceuille ma difformité dans ton gouffre compatissant" (80). Zahra absorbs Fatima's orientation for an abjective lover. Fatima is thus ever-present in the Zahra's choice in sexual partner. Because her wife functions as a mirror and reflects her disfigured femaleness, Zahra establishes in *L'Enfant de sable* the desire to take a blind man as a lover. Not only does she feel sheltered from whatever power a lover's gaze might hold, her description of intimacy with such a lover illustrates the draw she feels toward such a disability:

> J'ai eu l'idée ce matin d'adopter un enfant. Une idée brève qui est tombée avec la même rapidité qu'elle est arrivée. Un enfant? Je pourrais en faire un, avec n'importe qui, le laitier, le muezzin, le laveur de morts […] n'importe qui pourvu

> qu'il soit aveugle […] Pourquoi ne pas enlever un bel adolescent, lui bander les yeux et le récompenser par une nuit où il ne verra pas mon visage mais fera ce qu'il lui plaira de mon corps? Pour cela il faudrait quelques complicités et je n'ai pas envie de courir le risque d'une révélation. Mon corps a depuis ces temps-ci des désirs de plus en plus précis et je ne sais pas comment m'y prendre pour les satisfaire. (105)

Though a brief secondary fantasy of pregnancy tinges her fantasy to be intimate with a blind man, the origin of Zahra's lust results from her frustration with "désirs de plus en plus précis" for which she has no remedy. Her urge is primal rather than maternal. Masturbation no longer sufficient, Zahra requires sexual contact with a man, though it need not be consensual on his part. She finds herself aroused at the image of kidnapping a teenager, a rape scenario in which she convinces herself that her young lover would be reimbursed for having sex with her while wearing a blindfold, never told about her plan to conceive a child. The double meaning of *bander*, "to bandage" and "to have an erection," supports the abjective sexuality of the fantasy. Zahra cannot bear her lover's gaze, though she expects him to want to be blinded for their encounter, to even become aroused at being blindfolded.

Zahra also identifies emotional and psychological support within the paradigm of a blind, heterosexual male companion. Refined by the amalgamation of Salem's, Amar's, and Fatouma's versions, Zahra materializes in Argentina where she seeks out the company of blind Argentine author Jorge Luís Borges. Borges' presence in the novel is one of its most enigmatic components, drawing much speculation and attention from scholars. While everyone seems to agree that Ben Jelloun repeats Borges' narrative style of multiple twists, turns, and layers, there is much variation among interpretations of his more subtle textual roles. Carine Bourget finds that

he embodies the existence of Islam and *la condition musulmane* in the text, his presence intended to transfer "des éléments provenant de la culture arabo-musulmane" (732). Edna Aizenberg finds that the obscurity within Borgesian narratives predicts the "decentered" Third World quality present in *L'Enfant de sable* and other postcolonial works, writing that "Borges's role as a forerunner […] is significant in present literary-critical practice, particularly in the writing of such 'Third World' authors as Salman Rushdie, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Anton Shammas, and Sergio Chejfec, who see in the Argentine master a post-colonial precursor" (21).

The Borges figure in the text has heroic qualities, as if he arrives just in time to save Zahra from disappearing. The chapter in which he first appears is "Le Troubadour aveugle." He interrupts Fatouma's storytelling in Marrakesh to reveal that he knows what has become of Zahra: "C'est une femme, probablement arabe, en tout cas de culture islamique, qui s'est présentée un jour à moi […] À l'époque je n'étais pas encore aveugle; ma vue baissait énormement et tout m'apparaissait flou et hachuré. Je ne peux donc décrire le visage de cette femme" (174). Borges reveals that she came to him after following a lover to Buenos Aires but gives no other indication of how Zahra arrived in South America.

Borges' does not explain his appearance in Morocco, other than to state that he, too, does not understand it. Speaking about Zahra's turbulent past, he declares that he has come to rid himself of the burden of keeping it: "Le Secret est sacré, mais, quand il devient ridicule, il vaut mieux s'en débarrasser […] Et puis vous allez sans doute me demander qui je suis, qui m'a envoyé et pourquoi je débarque ainsi dans votre histoire […]Vous avez raison. Je vais vous expliquer […] Non" (171). Marie Fayad argues that these lines confirm that Borges' role within *L'Enfant de sable* has no rational basis: "His sudden appearance in the novel is surprising since he does not seem to have a logical reason for being there" (291). For Fayad, the Argentine

author is in an intertextual tool positioned not for the advancement of the plot or Zahra's development, but rather to inject the enigmatic text with literary reality: "Ben Jelloun contrives to create a link between the Argentine and the Arab elements in the blind storyteller's tale, pulling reality (the troubadour as Borges) back into fiction" (296). She contends that perhaps Borges lends a sense of realism to novel that is otherwise difficult to follow, ultimately concluding that either there exists no way to resolve his textual function, or that Ben Jelloun's use of Borges is self-serving and a source of flattery: "Most astutely, Ben Jelloun is using Borgesian devices to pay homage to Borges. In all likelihood, the reader has the feeling Borges would have appreciated Ben Jelloun's fantasy" (298).

But in fact, Borges' place in the text represents the obscurity and fantastical nature of *L'Enfant de sable*. Fayad herself concedes that "Borges's obsessions [were] labyrinths, mirrors and tigers" (294). *L'Enfant de sable* is nothing if not labyrinthine, and Ben Jelloun positions mirrors within the text both literally and metaphorically. Though unable to reflect Zahra's fractured psyche, the reason for which she avoided mirrors and hated Fatima, Borges nevertheless confirms Zahra's ambiguity and abjection. She pursues him not because his blindness shields her from his gaze, but because he reinforces her liminality in recognizing her hybrid gender expression even without laying eyes on her. His blindness does not prevent him from seeing her. Borges explains that her voice reveals everything: "J'ai rarement entendu une voix aussi grave et aiguë en même temps. Voix d'homme qui aurait subi une opération sur les cordes vocales? Voix de femme blessée à vie? Voix d'un castrat vieilli avant l'âge?" (174). He relies on these clues to understand Zahra, lamenting "[j]'avoue que, depuis ma cécité, je fais confiance à mes intuitions" (172). Borges finds himself aroused by Zahra's abjective gender expression:

> C'est curieux, mais cette femme au bord du naufrage réveilla en moi le souvenir du désir, et parfois le souvenir d'une émotion est plus violent, plus fort que la réalité elle-même […] Il y avait pour moi d'avantage d'ambiguïté dans sa présence chez moi que dans l'histoire de sa vie. Je la soupçonnais d'être encore masquée, capable de jouer sur les deux rives du fleuve. Oui, ce désir me ramena… (182)

Magnetized by Zahra's abjection, his fascination lingers even after she leaves: "J'ai été envoûté par cette femme. Bien après sa disparition, il m'arrivait de senter comme une urgence l'envie de la rechercher, de lui parler, de l'interroger…En tout cas elle fut le dernier visage que ma vue enregistra pour l'éternité" (187).

In keeping with true troubadour tradition, Borges' relationship to Zahra is chivalrous; his desires remain inactive and he does not act on the lust provoked by her abjection. Aware that Borges at least senses the gender expression that shames her, though there is no textual evidence that she understands his desire for her, Zahra eventually confides in him that she has come to him for consolation, convinced that he will understand her as if she were one of his characters. In a monologue to him, she expresses a longing to cleanse herself of lies and of maleness and to become someone new:

> Si j'ai décidé de parler aujourd'hui, c'est parce qu'enfin je vous ai trouvé. Vous seul êtes capable de comprendre pourquoi je suis ici en ce moment. Je ne suis pas un de vos personnages, j'aurais pu l'être…Depuis quelques années, je ne suis qu'une errance absurde. Je suis un corps en fuite…Je suis partie, chassée de mon passé par moi-même…Et pourtant j'ai besoin de justice, de vérité, et de pardon. Je suis allée de pays en pays avec la passion secrète de mourir dans l'oubli et de renaître dans le linceul d'un destin lavé de tout soupçon…J'ai tout quitté: la vieille

> maison, l'autorité que j'étais condamnée à exercer sur ma famille, les livres, le mensonge, et l'immense solitude qui m'était imposée. Je ne pouvais plus simuler une vie qui me faisait honte. (179)

His perception of her ambiguous abjection—"J'ai rarement entendu une voix aussi grave et aiguë en même temps. Voix d'homme qui aurait subi une opération sur les cordes vocales? Voix de femme blessée à vie? Voix d'un castrat vieilli avant l'âge?" (174)—reassures Zahra and soothes her shame, but most importantly, it encourages her to continue her journey of self-discovery and the welcoming of her womanhood as she senses that she is able to do so freely and without persecution. She explains that he alone sees beneath the "linceul" that has enshrouded her "errance absurde," his understanding reversing her decision to indulge the "passion secrète" that tempts her to commit suicide.

John D. Erickson reads the role of Borges quite differently, seeing his role as representative of the textual embedding that takes place in *L'Enfant de sable*. He also understands Borges' blindness to represent a refusal for body to represent a perceptible entity within the patriarchy of Islam: "Zahra resists being fixed and situated by the male gaze, by the Islamic 'dialectics of power'"(54). Her physique exists only for men to manipulate and is made and unmade (as is Morocco) by both an Arab-Muslim and a Europhallic center of power. Thus, her body defies perception because its femaleness is not fixed: "Zahra's story evolves around the unmaking of the female subject as defined by the male narrative of legitimization and the remaking of the female subject in terms that respect its specificity and difference" (60). But Zahra's subjectivity, rather than developing in spite of the male and patriarchal gaze in the text, requires it. Gaze motorized by abjective desire, even the metaphorical gaze implied by Borges'

functioning and enhanced senses, beckons to Zahra personhood as it resonates with her own sexual orientation.

Despite this commonality in sexual practice, Zahra's suitors need not seduce her or attack her for their desire to forge an interpelative force. Though Borges finds Zahra's liminality erotic, the final relationship she has in *L'Enfant de sable* is never more than friendship. And what a friendship; he travels all the way to Morocco to defend the story of her past.

2.4 ZAHRA DESIRES

L'Enfant de sable ends with the story of Zahra's relationship with Jorge Luis Borges as the last significant detail known about her. She re-emerges in *La Nuit sacrée* without confirming or denying any of the hypotheses made about her in the previous text, but she openly accepts and declares her womanhood in the storytelling of the sequel. Referring to it as her truth, she announces, "Ce qui importe c'est la verité. A présent que je suis vieille, j'ai toute la sérénité pour vivre. Je vais parler, déposer les mots et le temps. Je me sens un peu lourde" (5). Though she does not speak the word *femme* here, her use of the adjectives *vieille* and *lourde* reveals her acceptance of her femaleness. Gone are the days during which those around Zahra could not easily identify her as a woman, or that recognized her ambiguous gender expression. A waiter even mistakes her for another female customer: "Un café à la canelle, bien chaud, et une galette du maïs, mère Fadila, comme d'habitude" (12). Ben Jelloun himself has said, "What I wanted to show was the process of an emancipation […] a woman's struggle to become what she should have been had she not been the victim of an aggression against her sexuality and all her being" (Hayes 172). In light of this statement, the final analysis of this chapter to showing that Zahra's

womanhood, though solidified, is not free of abjection, and that *La Nuit sacrée* presents the abjection she desires, rather than the abjection for which she is desired.

The story begins with Zahra remembering her visit to her father's deathbed. Although he uses their final moments together to apologize for the trauma with which he has burdened his daughter, his monologue contains multiple references to the abjective, disfigured daughter he raised as a son. Even though her father remembers that Zahra/Ahmed filled him with joy and that she was "conçue dans la lumière" (28), he recalls that infant Zahra quickly became "l'image insupportable du monstre" (27), and that the love he feels for her weighs on him as an "amour lourd, impossible (28). Through no choice of her own, her failure to be a boy and the resulting gendered ambiguity were the shame of her parents. Just as her father gave her the name Ahmed, he releases her from a life of maleness by dubbing her Zahra, the "from A to Z" metaphor seemingly indicating that her personhood can now be complete: "La Nuit du Destin te nomme Zahra, fleur des fleurs, grâce, enfant de l'éternité" (32). Her father's monologue re-establishes in *La Nuit Sacrée* the abjection present in Zahra in *L'Enfant de sable*. He reminds readers of her monstrosity and of her disfigurement, therefore also reminding Zahra of her hybrid state. She consistently senses the heaviness of her past within her present.

The enigmatic twists and turns of *L'Enfant de sable* return in its sequel, and in *La Nuit Sacrée*, Zahra's journey of self-exploration, the stage at which she becomes the deject, is launched by a journey with a man on a white horse. He whisks her away to a secret village of children. Within its *jardin parfumé* Zahra begins her emancipation from Ahmed. Venturing out of the village for a stroll, she recalls sensations of corporeal freedom: "Ma surprise fut grande: je retrouvais une élégance inée! Mon corps se libérait de lui-même. Des cordes et des ficelles se dénouait peu à peu. Je sentais physiquement que mes muscles perdaient de leur fermeté. La

métamorphose se faisait en marchant" (44). Recognizing the new independence of her body, but reminded of the abjection that colored her childhood, Zahra begins to masturbate as she walks: "Je passais mes mains sur mes petits seins. Cela me faisait plaisir. Je les massais dans l'espoir de les voir grossir, sortir de leur trou, pointer avec fierté et exciter les passants" (44). This self-stimulation causes memories of her childhood abjection to re-surface, the source of her earliest sexual experiences, and Zahra recalls her sexual abuse at the hands of family friend Lalla Zineb:

> Elle me prenait dans ses bras, calait ma petite tête entre ses seins lourds et me serrait contre elle, de joie ou *d'envie*. Elle n'avait pas d'enfant et son mari l'avait abandonnée pour deux autres épouses qui lui en donnèrent beaucoup. Alors elle me serrait contre elle, me portait sur le dos, me tapotait les joues, me coinçait entre ses cuisses écartées. J'étais son objet, son jouet.[19] (45)

Lalla Zineb interprets Zahra's hybrid gender presentation as inhuman and pursues a sexual relationship with the child as if she were inanimate. More abject than Zahra's ambiguous gender is Lalla's pedophiliac connection to the child.

Between these memories of the abjection of her youth and the liberation of her body is sandwiched Zahra's initial masturbation. Stimulated by her memories of Lalla Zineb, it repeats:

> Je touchai mes seins. Ils émergaient lentement. J'ouvris mon chemisier pour les offirir au vent du matin, un petit vent bénéfique qui les caressait…Une envie folle m'envahit: j'ai retiré mon saroual puis ma culotte pour faire plaisir au vent, pour me faire plaisir et sentir la main légère et froide de cette brise matinale passer sur mon ventre et réveiller mes sens. (45)

[19] Emphasis mine.

Here, walking through the forest and masturbating, Zahra experiences her first orgasm: "Mon corps tremblait de joie. Mon cœur battait très fort. Je respirais de manière irrégulière. Je n'avais jamais eu autant de sensations. Mon corps qui a une image plate, déserté, dévasté, accaparé par l'apparence et le mensonge, rejoignait la vie. J'étais vivante" (46). Though this version of events differs greatly from that of *L'Enfant de sable*, the framework of sexuality remains the same. Zahra continues to grow into herself and to abandon the pain of being Ahmed, refined by the sexuality instigated by desire for her abjection. She achieves her first orgasm while celebrating the freedom of her body and while indulging memories of her sexually abjective magnetism.

And that magnetism persists. The horseman, known as *le Cheikh*, alarmed by her masturbation in his magic garden, expels her from the village, relegating her to the role of animal. Her association with animals suggests that she remains in the margins of what is intelligible as human: "Je dormis ce soir-là avec les animaux, à l'étable située à la sortie du village" (48). One of the village's children approaches her in the stable and confirms for her that liberated though she may feel, her monstrosity remains disruptive: "Tu es même bonne. Mais quelque chose en toi provoque la destruction. Je ne sais pas quoi. Je le sens. Un malheur doit t'habiter. À ton insu. Il se propage et se nourrit de la défaite des autres" (49). The fear and repulsion present in the Ahmed of *L'Enfant de sable* live on in Zahra of *La Nuit sacrée*.

The children of the village and its horseman are imagined properties within the text; she explains in the following chapter that she fled immediately after her father's funeral, running away out of her own agency. Her first orgasm, though legitimate, is experienced in the horseman's *jardin parfumé* and thus the result of rich fantasy. Zahra's next sexual encounter is her first consensual sexual intercourse with a man. Thus far, Zahra's only sexual experience with a man was her anal rape at the hands of Abbas. In this scene, though Zahra does not actively

pursue the sex act, her compliance is borne of her own lust driven by sadomasochistic potential of a nonconsensual sex with a stranger. The intercourse she shares with him represents the first indication that her own desire is colored by abjection.

The lover approaches her as she travels through the forest, warning Zahra, "Ma sœur s'engage dans un bois touffu, où les sangliers attendent la nuit pour dévorer leur proie" (60). The man's announcement implies that the forest is replete with rapists, rather than boars, awaiting victims rather than prey. Zahra responds with interest:

> J'eus comme un frisson de la tête aux pieds. Cet homme à la voix suave ne me faisait pas peur. J'avais entendu parler des viols dans la forêt. Je n'avais pas envie de fuir, ni même de résister si l'homme devenait un sanglier. Je n'étais pas indifférente. J'étais curieuse. Un homme dont je ne connaissais même pas le visage éveillait en moi des sensations physiques avec seulement des mots. (60)

Unafraid that the man may rape her, Zahra's excitement stems from the abjection of rape and of forced intercourse as she feels aroused imagining the acts to follow. Because she shares that the possibility of sex with this man makes her "curieuse" instead of frightened, we cannot conclude that the acts that ensue are sexually violent. Zahra's passivity during the sex act should not be interpreted as victimization, but rather a cautious observance of sexual intercourse. Unsure of what is to come, she is willing to risk the chance that she might be raped in order to satisfy her curiosity about what it means to have sex with a man.

Though Zahra does not acknowledge the man, he follows her, praying out loud, at times to Allah, at times to Zahra. He tells her not face him: "Ne te retourne pas" (61). She stops walking: "Je m'arrêtai. J'étais comme retenue par une force invisible" (61). Though the two have yet to even touch, Zahra's desire to experience intercourse compels her to undress: "J'eus

très chaud tout d'un coup. Sans m'en rendre compte je retirai ma djellaba. J'avais en dessous juste un saroual large. Je dénouai mes cheveux" (62). The stranger responds to her invitation:

> Il me prit par les hanches. Sa langue parcourait ma nuque, puis mes épaules; il s'agenouilla. Je restai debout. Il embrassa mes reins. Ses mains étaient toujours sur mes hanches. Avec ses dents il dénoual mon saroual. Son visage sueur ou en larmes était plaqué contre mes fesses. Il délirait. D'une geste brusque il me mit à terre. Je poussai un cri brief. Il mit sa main gauche contre ma bouche. Avec l'autre, il me mantenait face à la terre. Je n'avais ni la force, ni l'envie de résister. Je ne pensais pas; j'étais libre sous le poids de ce corps fiévreux. Pour la première fois un corps se mêlait au mien…Tous mes membres vibraient. (62)

Notions of restraint and release complicate this intercourse. On the one hand, her lover controls her movements by putting her to the ground, holding her there, and covering her mouth with his hand. Yet Zahra does not resist, explaining that she did not possess the strength to do so, and ultimately did not want to. Zahra feels emancipated during this sex act, insisting that she feels not dominate or controlled, but instead "libre sous le poids de ce corps fiévreux" Most importantly, the stranger's restraint of her body and her voice arouses her. Finding pleasure in sadomasochism of sexualized constraint, Zahra climaxes: "tous mes membres vibraient" (62). This relishing of her heterosexuality relies not upon the penis, per se, but the abjective qualities of ambiguous consent and rough sex with anonymous men. Though heterosexuality remains the bedrock of Moroccan culture, Ben Jelloun emphasizes Zahra's queer desires to highlight the danger of female sexuality within this cultural context. As Charrad writes:

> What is feared in the Islamic tradition, and what must be controlled, is not sexuality in general. It is female sexuality, since female nature is the symbol of

> destruction. Left unbridled, a woman's very nature is likely to lead to chaos. Her subversive tendencies must therefore be restrained, and her behavior regulated, if social disruption is to be avoided […] As a sexual being, she is described as a threat to morality and the social order. (57)

This initial orgasm thus represents much more than Zahra's foray into sexual pleasure; it marks the transgressive power of her sexuality, significant not only because it is that of a female, but also because it disobeys traditional heteronormative rule.

Readers are aware of the magnitude carried by this intercourse because Ben Jelloun colors the experience with blood. It reminds of the critical images of circumcision and menstruation from Zahra's childhood in *L'Enfant de sable*: "Je sentis un liquide chaud et épais couler sur mes cuisses…Je glissai ma main droite sous mon ventre. Je palpai le liquide que je perdais. C'était du sang" (62). Circumcision was Zahra's baptism as Ahmed, and her menstruation was her baptism as a woman. The blood resulting from the loss of her virginity baptizes her a sexual agent, an adult with authority over her sexual urges and an awareness of the abjective conditions that excite her.

Such cognizance renders Zahra curious about this sudden expression of sadomasochism. She conjectures after the act, "Je ne fus ni mécontente ni déçue. Était-ce cela l'amour? Un poignard caressant le dos sous les ténèbres? Une violence cinglante qui vous enlace par-derrière comme une cible au hasard, ponctuée par des incantations et par des prières?" (63). The encounter in the forest paints her first consensual sexual experience as violent, and though she later remembers it as inescapable, an event she was destined to experience, recalling, "Le destin dirigea mes pas vers le hammam. Ce fut le viol dans la forêt que me poussa vers ce lieu" (136).

Within the *hammam*, Zahra meets the figure through whom she experiences the abjective sexuality that becomes the ultimate force in the formation of her personhood. Immediately following the intercourse with the stranger in the forest, she approaches the baths to cleanse herself. The seated *gardienne*, to whom Zahra refers throughout the novel only as l'Assise, immediately senses that Zahra has just had sex. She interrogates Zahra: "C'est maintenant qu'on vient se débarasser des crachats des hommes?" (64). Just as Oum Abbas instinctively sought out Zahra, l'Assise later declares that destiny arranged their chance meeting. She claimed that she sensed Zahra's arrival, insisting that "quand je t'ai vue entrer dans le hammam, prise de froid et de panique, j'ai tout de suite lu dans tes yeux que tu nous avais été envoyée la dernière Nuit du Destin…Je peux dire que je t'attendais" (112). L'Assise appears to be a recycled version of Oum Abbas and the beggar woman, each woman awaiting Zahra's appearance. She also reiterates the abjective incest of Oum Abbas, maintaining a sexual relationship with her closest male relative.

This is Zahra's first trip to a *hammam* as a woman; her mother brought her as a young boy. Florence Ramond Jurney bases her reading of this scene from *L'Enfant de sable* on Kristeva's analysis of strangers in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, in which Kristeva argues that the exiled and the foreigner who choose not to remember a mother/motherland as the mother/motherland have abandoned it. When she becomes an adolescent boy, Zahra's mother exiles her and prohibits her from entering the *hammam*. The earlier bathhouse was thus feminized by this stringent adherence to a rigidly gendered space. L'Assise's bathhouse is a space in which gender and sexuality deviate from the norm: "la délimitation sexuelles des rôles est plutôt bien appliquée et est en général bien respectée, certaines transgressions existent, suggérant la naissance d'un espace de résistance dans le système binaire dicté par la société" (Jurney 1135). The gender binary is dismantled here, as a sexual nonce taxonomy based upon

desire for the abject, rather than the body as an object, emerges between two heterosexual partners: Zahra and the *gardienne*'s blind brother, le Consul. Le Consul is drawn to Zahra's androgyny and self-loathing, interpellating her into subjectivity. Likewise, her arousal for his disability and for the incest he shares with l'Assise forms an interpellation by which he, too, becomes a subject.

Homeless, Zahra moves in with l'Assise and le Consul. Zahra's respect and curiosity for the man repeats the reverence shown for the Borges figure in *L'Enfant de sable*. As with Borges, le Consul interpellates Zahra' through perception and not spectacle. The re-introduction of a blind, would-be paramour insists upon a desire oriented toward Zahra's abjective ambiguity. The patterns of Borges/le Consul and the beggar woman/Oum Abbas/l'Assise point to an orientation within Zahra's abjective ambiguity. The commonalities between these sets of characters suggest parameters within their desire that point to abjective erotics as a focus of sexual energy and attention.

Motifs emerge in Zahra's abjective desire, as well. As with the Borges character, she finds le Consul's disability both sexually compelling and unnerving. Initially unfazed, Zahra eventually fears it and becomes disturbed by it. Her abjective attraction to le Consul arrives through a cycle of first experiencing fear and disgust for him, his disability and for his sexual relationship with his sister, followed by an intensely magnetic pull to replace l'Assise as his sexual partner. Zahra's heterosexuality is thus not merely about a desire for intimacy with a man; she requires that repulsion lace her desire, for abjection is her object choice.

The cycle of desire unravels during a return trip to the *hammam*. Zahra witnesses their co-dependency and incest, first explaining away their intimacy by misunderstanding their sounds of sexual pleasure:

> la sœur, avec juste une serviette autour de la taille, était assise sur le Consul étendu à plat ventre. Elle le massait en étirant ses membres, accompagnant ses gestes de petits cris qui n'étaient pas des cris de plaisir mais ressemblaient quand même au bruit de baisers rentrés. C'était curieux de les voir dans cette position…Ils en tiraient tous les deux un plaisir certain. (89)

This "plaisir certain" can be none other than abjective, incestuous pleasure. The nearly nude and obese woman straddling and massaging her brother evokes both disgust and curiosity. Zahra mistakes their groans for the sounds of lovemaking because that is, indeed, what the massage is intended to simulate.

Before long, le Consul presents Zahra with his response to his sister's massage as if he wishes for her to reap the benefit of his arousal. His erection indicates the beginning of a cycle of desire and repulsion circulating between himself and Zahra:

> l'Assise me demande de lui savonner le dos et les fesses. Le Consul rigolait en silence…Elle s'était endormie et ronflait. Le Consul mit sa main sur mon sein gauche. Il s'excusa. C'était l'épaule qu'il voulait toucher. Il me demanda de la laisser dormir. Son corps était fin. Sous la serviette, son sexe était en érection. (90)

Provoked by his strange sexual relationship with his sister, but unwilling to consummate it with intercourse, he projects his lust onto Zahra. Massaging l'Assise has rendered her a party to this strange *ménage-à-trois*, and she assumes the role of the objet of le Consul's desire. He enjoys watching Zahra massage his sleeping, snoring sister, his pleasure expressed through his muffled laughing.

As with the blind Borges, le Consul's primary appeal to Zahra is through his intelligence and sensitivity. But his sensitivity frightens her while at the *hammam*. She is upset by the sexuality of le Consul's disability, realizing that his inability to see may actually enhance the erotics of the scene as it forces other sense to become more acute: "J'ai appris alors que les aveugles ne pouvaient avoir de fantasmes à base d'images, mais à partir d'odeurs, de situations concrètes avec parfois une mise en scène" (90). The erotic atmosphere created by le Consul and l'Assise thus disgusts Zahra:

> Je sentis un moment que j'étais devenue un jouet entre les mains d'un couple infernal…Elle était ridicule avec son derrière en l'air. J'avais l'impression de laver une montagne morte…Je lui dis que l'œuf m'avait donné la nausée. Je me levai et me préciptai pour vomir dans un coin ce que je venais d'avaler. (90)

Zahra's nausea stimulates the man even further: "Cette atmosphère de pénombre, de vapeur et d'humidité, avec en plus la présence de deux femmes, provoquait chez le Consul une excitation sexuelle évidente […] Le Consul s'était retiré dans un coin sombre, la face contre le mur. Je savais que si je le laissais me toucher il perdrait son sang-froid" (90). In turn, le Consul's augmented desire results in Zahra's even greater repulsion. The more he desires her, the more she finds reason to shun his advances: "Il me demanda à voix basse de lui passer le savon sur le dos. Je refusai. Il n'insista pas. Je n'avais aucun désir. Il me suffisait de regarder l'Assise étalée au milieu du hammam pour avoir de nouveau la nausée" (90). Le Consul's desire represents his wish to include Zahra in the incest he maintains with his sister. So aroused by her presence during this vulnerable intimacy with his sister, she senses that simply washing his back will provoke him to erection and even ejaculation. His desire does not immediately arouse Zahra's;

her explanation that "je n'avais aucun désir" clarifies that, if only for the time being, he disgusts her.

The erotics of the scene culminate when a dozing Zahra awakes to find that her refusal to soap le Consul's back has sent him back to the embrace of his sister:

> J'entendis des cris langoureux, suivis de râles. Et je vis—en fait je crois avoir vu—le Consul recroquevillé dans les bras de sa sœur. Elle lui donnait le sein. Il tétait comme un enfant. Je ne réussis pas à savoir lequel des deux poussait ces râles de plaisir. La scène durait depuis un bon moment. Je les observais, mais eux ne pouvaient pas me voir. Comment était-ce possible? Cet homme si fin, si intelligent, réduit à l'état d'enfance dans les bras de cette femme! Pendant qu'il tétait, elle lui massait les pieds et les jambes. Il devait passer par tous ces détours pour satisfaire son besoin.
>
> Lorsque je les vis sortir tous les deux enveloppés dans de grandes serviettes, je compris un pacte secret les unissait pour la vie jusqu'à la mort. (91)

Le Consul and l'Assise, through their desire for each other, also share a desire for Zahra. His blindness repulses Zahra and his sexual intimacy with his sister repulses her. Yet, as Zahra's friendship with le Consul grows stronger and she learns more about his abjective rapport with his sister, her arousal for his abjection surfaces. Her disgust inevitably transforms into desire.

L'Assise explains to Zahra that her sexual relationship with her brother extends to his intimacy with prostitutes. At his insistence, she accompanies him to brothels, and though she waits outside the door while he has sex with prostitutes, she is nevertheless an integral part of his encounters there. She recounts that:

> Il m'obligeait à l'accompagner. Je lui décrivais les femmes […] Je compris que son plaisir était dans ce déplacement avec moi en ce lieu interdit […] À la longue j'ai pris du plaisir à l'accompagner et à chosir avec lui la femme qui allait lui donner de la joie […] Ça ne pouvait pas durer. J'étais en fait l'œil du péché. Et puis ce genre de situation ne devraient pas exister entre un frère et une sœur. Mais il y a tellement de choses entre nous et qui ne devraient pas exister. (111)

L'Assise's acknowledgement that such a situation "ne devraient pas exister entre un frère et une sœur" confirms the abjection of their intimacy. The sex acts committed by le Consul are initially motivated by his abjective desire for his sister. She arouses him, but because their intimacy does not include penetration, he copulates with prostitutes as a means of expressing that desire.

L'Assise's story of abjective incest and prostitution not only arouses Zahra, it compels her to take the sister's place in le Consul's life. As l'Assise continues her story of incest and desire, explaining that her brother's desire for her began during childhood, she invites Zahra to replace her role as her brother's lover:

> Quand il était petit, je le lavais…Il y prenait un plaisir évident, jusqu'au jour où ce plaisir, commemt te dire? ce plaisir était précédé d'un désir…Il me disait: "J'ai envie que tu me laves…" Il n'était plus un enfant. Il restait seul un long moment dans la salle d'eau. Après, j'allais nettoyer le sol. Je ne sais pas s'il urinait ou faisait autre chose, mais il y avait saletés partout, un peu comme au hammam en fin de matinée après le passage des hommes…Mais tu es venue. Tu es notre salvatrice, un ange qui est déjà au courant de tout…tu vas devenir complice. (111)

Though l'Assise claims uncertainty about whether or not her brother ejaculates during his bath time, the *jeu de mots* that he took obvious pleasure from the encounter "jusqu'au jour" suggests that he enjoyed it "jusqu'au jouir." She tells Zahra that she knew Zahra is "déjà au courant" reinforcing that Zahra's desire for abjection is evident. This explanation cements Zahra's desire. She commits to understanding le Consul's sexuality within the brothel first-hand.

When l'Assise charges Zahra with the responsibility of joining le Consul at the brothel, Zahra acknowledges the inherent abjection of such places in which sex is sold. Her arousal is piqued: "Je suis curieuse. Vous me donnez l'occasion d'entrer là où je n'aurais jamais mis les pieds. Avec vous j'ai une excuse" (123). His blindness punctuates the experience, arousing her further as his disability obliges Zahra's active participation: "La patronne me demanda de les décrire" (125). He relies completely on the accuracy of her descriptions of the prostitutes, but Zahra takes advantage of his blindness, lying to him as she describes a beautiful blonde woman who fears le Consul's desire: "Elle est très mince, brune, avec de tout petits seins, la taille fine, les cheveux courts, les fesses équilibrées, les lèvres charnues. Elle ne mâche pas de chewing-gum. Elle a envie de vous" (126). She illustrates not the prostitute, but herself. Le Consul selects her, but Zahra dismisses the prostitute and remains alone with le Consul.

Zahra's desire for his abjection culminates within the brothel. Disgust for his incest, pity for his blindness, and the uncleanliness of the whorehouse activate her desire:

> J'avais déjà quitté ma djellaba et ma robe. Doucement je m'approchai du lit et déboutonnai le saroual du Consul. Je laissai la faible lumière allumée et j'enjambai son bassin. Lentement je le laissai pénétrer en moi, mettant mes mains sur ses épaules pour l'empêcher de changer de position. Il jouit très vite […] Mon manque total d'expérience était pallié par l'absence de pudeur ou de gêne. Le

> désir dirigeait instinctivement mon corps et lui dictait les mouvements appropriés. J'étais devenue folle. Je découvrais le plaisir pour la première fois de ma vie dans un bordel avec un aveugle! (126)

Le Consul consents to sex with the woman that matches the description Zahra gives, with the illustration of Zahra herself, so she is aware that "il n'était pas dupe" (126). He then deduces that he had sex with Zahra and not a prostitute. Nevertheless, the manipulation in the act colors it with abjection. Although the intercourse was consensual, Zahra's deceit complicates le Consul's compliance just as her passive permission complicated her encounter with the stranger in the forest. Her trickery arouses le Consul as the aggression of the stranger aroused Zahra: "Une complicité liait nos corps dans le silence et le secret. Il ne fallait surtout pas parler, mettre dans les mots un mensonge apparent qui était en fait une vérité à ne pas nommer" (126). To speak of their sex act would be to classify it as consensual lovemaking or as bold manipulation. Remaining silent allows the encounter to remain ambiguous and without classification, a reflection of the Zahra's gender expression. Le Consul's consent is uncertain, as Zahra's consent during the intercourse in the forest was uncertain, and as her consent to forced malehood was uncertain, even despite her marriage.

Furthermore, though the prostitutes at this brothel may have had sex with le Consul, they did not desire him and their role in the sex act was perfunctory rather than passionate. Le Consul arouses Zahra, and her erotic gaze interpellates him in the same fashion in which the beggar woman, Oum Abbas and her son, and Borges interpellated her. Much like Zahra's ambiguous and broken gender expression, le Consul's disability situates him in the margins of humanity. He is intelligible as a human but cannot autonomously function in human society. Zahra's lovemaking reveals that he may not function independently in human society, but that he

functions effortlessly in matters of human anatomy. She has thus brought him within the realm of subjectivity.

My reading of the scene in the brothel insists that both Zahra and le Consul achieve a greater sense of self through their shared, deceptive lovemaking, for it is through these sexual experiences with the Consul that she determines her heterosexuality. Hayes examines the passage much differently, concluding that this "comédie du bordel" is a series of drag performances; a woman performing maleness as Ahmed, who performs learned femaleness as Zahra, who in turn assumes the role of prostitute. He, too, finds the heterosexuality within the text inseparable from abjection. Hayes argues:

> Though *La Nuit sacrée* perhaps does not estabish *once and for all* that heterosexuality is or must be like prostitution, or is or must be based on rape, I would suggest that a careful reading of the novel at least raises questions as to whether heterosexuality as currently performed and instituted as a compulsory system in the Maghreb (or in the West, for that matter) can exist separately from these two practices. (177)

The encounter in the brothel is tinged with both prostitution–Zahra acts as a prostitute within a place of prostitution–*and* rape–the sex act is not overtly consensual. Each oriented toward the abject as object choice, both parties defy heteronormativity and reflect queerness.

Zahra and le Consul, now both agents in their sexual independence, continue to relish the abjection of their sexual attraction. They refrain from speaking of it and persist in having secret intercourse at the brothel: "Nous nous jouâmes la comédie du bordel pendant quelque temps, plus par envie de mise en scène dans le silence et le secret que par craine d'éveiller les soupçons de l'Assise" (130). The use of *jouâmes* strengthens the sexuality of their secretive encounters,

the secrecy enhancing the sexuality of their intimacy. Despite l'Assise's invitation to Zahra to join in their abjectively sexual relationship, l'Assise suddenly grows to hate Zahra. She senses that Zahra's appetite for abjective sex has transitioned from yearning to satisfaction. Desperate to rid her from the household, l'Assise attempts to marry Zahra off:

> L'ASSISE: Ça y est! J'ai ce qu'il te faut.
>
> ZAHRA: De quoi s'agit-il?
>
> L'ASSISE: Enfin, ne fais pas l'ignorante, il s'agit de ce à quoi tu penses tout le temps et qui te donnes des insomnies.
>
> ZAHRA: Il y a tellement de choses qui empêchent de dormir…
>
> L'ASSISE: Oui, mais ça, ça te gratte, c'est comme un ver qui se promène sous la peau et on n'arrive pas à l'attraper pour se gratter une bonne fois pour toutes. Ça démange… (130)

The metaphor of the wriggling, scratching represents the insatiability and strangeness of Zahra's desire that l'Assise has long sensed within her. She can only conclude that Zahra has seduced her brother. This infuriates l'Assise, because she has somehow stumbled upon a misinformed version of Zahra's history: "C'est une ursurpatrice, un mensonge, un danger…Cette femme transporte en elle une vie où elle a trompé tout le monde. Il paraît qu'elle a tué ses parents" (121). She desperately names Zahra's ambiguity, interpellating the very state that provoked her desire for Zahra, along with that of her brother: "C'est femme est un homme! J'ai des preuves, des photos, des papiers" (122).

But the seduction of le Consul, abjective on behalf of both parties, continues in spite of l'Assise and her growing hatred. That the sexual relationship persists within the brothel reinforces its abjection; le Consul remains stimulated by Zahra's deceptions and she draws

pleasure from manipulating the blind man she pities. The final scenes of the novel reveal the solidification of Zahra's personhood within her seduction of le Consul. Her burgeoning self-confidence results in her most abjective corporeal state yet, reminding that her greatest appeal is as a confused, confusing, liminal figure.

When l'Assise divulges her hatred toward Zahra, she leaves town in search of proof from Zahra's past that can be used to imprison her. While away, Zahra and le Consul have sex within the home for the first time. Though this sex act does not take place in the abjectively infused brothel, the house still holds great abjective appeal for her. Representative of l'Assise and her bitterness, the home scares and intimidates Zahra. Her post-coital reflection suggests the fear that provokes her desire: "Nous fîmes l'amour pour la première fois dans la maison…Je repensais aux menaces et manigances de l'Assise. Elle était capable de faire le malheur: nous détruire, ou au moins me démolir. Ce matin elle avait de la bave à la commissure des lèvres. C'était le signe extérieur de la haine…Elle devait détenir quelques indices ou informations sur mon passé" (136). Within the abjective forces of fear, lust and hatred, Zahra finds herself reborne through the intercourse she shares with le Consul: "Il se comparait à un sculpteur: 'Pour que votre corps me devienne familier, pour qu'il renonce à être rebelle, il faut que je le sculpte soigneusement, patiemment', me disait-il encore" (137). Per Haraway's conclusions, Zahra's experiences forge her sense of self, and the unique sexual orientation she cultivates conforms to Haraway's claim that the cyborg rebels against gender and sexuality norms.

Zahra's body is *rebelle* not because it is ambiguous and abjective—it will remain both of these qualities for the duration of the novel—but because it resists comprehension. Le Consul's lovemaking does not heal or cure her broken gender expression, but rather recognizes and appreciates it. During their intercourse, Zahra arrives at feelings of self-solidification and

congealment as she recalls the self-loathing of her childhood, youth and early adulthood and the complicated relationship she has had with desire and sexual fulfillment:

> J'avais passé mon adolescence à repousser de toutes mes forces le désir. J'étais piégée mais je tirais de cette situation assez de bénéfice. J'avais fini par ne plus penser au désir. Je n'y avais pas le droit. Je me contentais de mes rêves délirants, peuplés de phallus, de corps d'éphèbes et de banquets vulgaires. Il m'arrivait souvent de calmer mon corps moi-même et d'en avoir honte…[Le Consul] m'avait sculptée en statue de chair, désirée et désirante…Je sentais se solidifier, se consolider, chacun de mes membres. Je n'étais plus cet être de vent dont toute la peau n'était qu'un masque, une illusion faite pour tromper une société sans vergogne…Il m'avait fallu l'oubli, l'errance et la grâce pour distillée par l'amour, pour renaître et vivre. (137)

Zahra becomes herself through the abjectively sexual bond she has forged with le Consul. Abjective desire has fashioned this woman both *désirée* and *désirante*; her desire and desirability are created by the same abjective impulse. She becomes a person through this permission to desire and to return desire. Not only is Zahra reborn as a woman, she recognizes that her womanhood is finally legibility to those around her and that she is no longer "une illusion faite pour tromper une société."

Yet even as Zahra understands the process of self-formation underway during this intercourse, she is aware that her womanhood faces further abjection. Following their lovemaking, she laments:

> Hélas! ce bonheur, cette plénitude, cette découverte de soi dans le regard sublime d'un aveugle n'allait pas durer. Je le savais. Je le pressentais. Ce bonheur bref

mais intense allait être brutalement interrompu. Même si j'étais malheureuse, j'acceptais les ricochets du destin. (138)

Though she may no longer be abjective in gender expression, abjective ambiguity remains part of her subjectivity. Once interpellated by such lust, her gaze now qualifies le Consul as a human and desirable figure and their sexual relationship ultimately predicts his personal liberation from his sister's control and Zahra's return to an ambiguous, hybrid.

2.4.1 Disfigured Gender, Disfigured Sex

The intercourse shared by Zahra and le Consul arises only because l'Assise has left town for several days. She returns with Zahra's uncle in tow, the brother of her deceased father, and reminded of the pain and turmoil of her early adulthood, Zahra shoots him in a panic. The ensuing trials results in her conviction. The court sentences her to 15 years of prison. Imprisoned, she is attacked by her sisters during a visit to the prison. The assault represents a transition within Zahra. Her father's pricking of his finger during her false circumcision symbolizes her passage into maleness; her menstruation represents the confirmation of her femaleness; the broken hymen during her lost virginity signifies her entry into desire.

The sisters restrain Zahra, performing a female "circumcision" and slicing away her clitoris. The blood in this scene denotes corporeal, genital mutilation, defacing the vagina that has until this point remained uncompromisingly female. While her early ambiguous gender expression created her initial abjection, Zahra's womanhood became intelligible as she explored her abjective lust. Yet now, the biological signifier of her womanhood, the vagina, has been maimed. The clitoris also signifies Zahra's sexual functionality. The attack both compromises her femaleness and disables her desire.

Holding Zahra down, her sisters tell her:

> Rappelle-toi, tu n'es qu'un trou entouré de deux jambes maigrichonnes. Et ce trou on va te le boucher définitivement. On va te faire une petite circoncision, on ne va pas simuler, ce sera pour de bon, il n'y aura pas de doigt coupé, non, on va te couper le petit chose qui dépasse, et avec une aiguille et du fil on va museler ce trou. On va te débarasser de ce sexe que tu as caché. La vie sera plus simple. Plus de désir. Plus de plaisir. Tu deviendras une chose, un légume qui bravera jusqu'à la mort. (161)

The variation in the gender of *chose* (*le petit chose* and *une chose*) reinforces Zahra's hybridity and the ambiguity rendered by the mutilation her gender. Her formerly standard femaleness has been jeopardized.

The blood present at her first, false circumcision, her menstruation and vaginal penetration reoccurs upon the assault: "J'étais dans ma cellule: mon saroual plein de sang. Mon sexe était cousu" (160). Feelings of abjection bathe Zahra in feelings of self-loathing and despair: "Durant plus d'un mois j'étais perdue, égarée, sans repères, folle, délirant la nuit, fiévreuse, au bord de tous les abîmes" (160). Even her fantasies of revenge fail as she indulges the shame she feels for her body: "Et pourtant je fus hantée par l'idée de vengeance. J'élaborai dans ma tête plusieurs scénarios, ensuite la honte de moi-même, le dégoût de cette famille, me ramenaient à mon pauvre état, désemparée et ruinée" (160). Distancing herself from le Consul, who has stopped visiting her, she writes to him, "Suis dans le noir et ne vous vois plus. Malade. Malade. Le corps blessé" (160). Beginning the sentence without the personal pronoun *je* signifies the loss of Zahra's sense of self. The disfigured gender expression of *L'Enfant de sable*,

revived by the mutilation of her vagina, has metastasized and spread to her genitals, rejuvenating feelings of self-abjection.

And yet this self-disgust and disfigurement translates into Zahra's desirability once again. The final scenes of the text, written with obscure and confusing detail, follow Zahra's release from prison. Within these scenes, the reiteration of the cycle of desire initiated by her abjection is re-activated. The novel therefore ends not with the final stages of the cycle, but rather as it begins. Erotic desire for the abject emerges in this text not as a linear series of points, but as a cycle of repeating themes. Not a momentary desire nor an erotic episode, the sexuality of these characters orients toward the abject. Lust for those on the fringes of humanity, those barely recognizable as human, materializes as a sexual orientation that recognizes and highlights the human condition of the object. The object, now a subject, occupies part of the cycle and furthers abjective desire in the same manner.

Zahra has occupied both roles, first as the desired and finally as she who desires. The conclusion of the text reinforces the notion of the circulation between the abject and desire, and she returns to the role of the desirable. She becomes the deject once again, wandering. Her liberty does not soothe her self-loathing, and she describes the pain of her recurring liminality as existing in "ni un corps de femme plein et avide, ni un corps d'homme serein et fort; j'étais entre les deux, c'est-à-dire en enfer" (178). As ever, her disfigurement renders her irresistible. The wanderlust of this deject generates a following, this time of other women, broken and abjective women, who regard Zahra as an mythic source of healing:

> Elles avaient entendu parler de la Sainte des sables, fille de lumière, dont les mains avaient la grâce et le pouvoir d'arrêter l'irrémédiable, d'empêcher le malheur et peut-être même d'éloigner définitivement la stérilité du corps des

jeunes femmes. Elles venaient là après avoir tout essayé. J'étais leur ultime recours. (180)

Her disfigurement reflects and draws their abjection, and though the young women may not experience a sexual draw, Zahra's abjection, even in these final pages, appeals to le Consul's sexual desire. He travels a great distance to be reunited with her. In the procession of girls waiting to receive Zahra's healing touch, her awareness of her abjection becomes suddenly acute: "L'enfer était en moi, avec son désordre, ses hallucinations et sa démence" (181) Her lover has returned to her, and though she does not recognize him immediately, she identifies le Consul's desire for her: "Je ne savais pas ce que je faisais. Le ventre nu qui se présenta à moi était poilu. Ma main descendit un peu et rencontra un membre en érection" (181). We do not learn about how Zahra's disfigured body responds to le Consul's arousal. There exists no final passage in which his desire for her abjective hybridity, or her lust for his abjective disability, activates sexual interaction or intercourse. The sequence of abjectively motorized sexual events begins again, but does not end. It is this energy between abjection and desire that circulates between subjects and objects and that cements together. They are each other's permanent orientation.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter interrogates currents of abjective desire both toward and from protagonist Zahra in *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*. I monitor their circulation between frameworks of disfigurement–Zahra's altered gender expression, her mutilated vagina, Fatima's epilepsy, and le Consul's blindness. But though this desire is motivated by the body, no thriving normative hetero- or homosexuality can be located within these frameworks. Zahra's same-sex experiences

do not outweigh those that she shares with men. Bodies instead are desirable for their misrepresentation, their deformation, and their damage. Bodies do not limit the abjective erotics flourishing here, but rather provide a surface for their interaction. The binaries of homo- and heterosexuality are likewise dismantled in the following discussion, as the already queer desire present in the works of Jean Genet fosters the queerness of abjective sex and sexuality.

3.0 ABJECT CHOICE AS OBJECT CHOICE: ANTI-SOCIAL SEXUAL REVOLUTION IN JEAN GENET'S *NOTRE-DAME-DES-FLEURS* AND *LE BALCON*

In my introduction, I argue that abjective desire may be a way to consider sexuality outside of and indeed beyond a system of corporeal morphologies and their agents. Abjection itself can be thought of as a nonce taxonomy, a cultivated sentiment of anti-social feelings associated non-exclusively with a body (though it can be prompted by and experienced within the body), and just as easily connected to a situation or a setting. In Chapter One, I explained how abjection, by virtue of its presence within the desire(s) directed from and toward Zahra, can be situated as a nonce taxonomy of its own; feelings of abjection stimulate sexual attraction, rather than desire directed at a body alone. In this chapter, I further that discussion by using texts in which Genet produces bodies that provoke sentiments of abjection not, or not only, in relationship to their morphology, but also with respect the to physical, criminal and above all anti-social actions that these bodies carry out.

The anti-normativity of non-social behaviors, analogies for the social marginalization of queerness itself, assumes a central role in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon* as themes of criminal acts, humiliation, betrayal and sadness, seduce multiple parties in each text. I argue that these transgressions represent small-scale social revolution within acts of sex and of social disobedience, acts of rebellion tied to a community of figures that share the sexual common denominator of queerness. Throughout this chapter, the terms "queer" and "criminal" will appear in relation to abjection. For Genet, criminality is synonymous with queerness, both in the social and the sexual sense. In fact, the author was incarcerated multiple times in his lifetime,

beginning even as a teenager, and many of his own experiences with queer sexuality took place during these incarcerations.[20] One of the goals of this chapter is to examine not just the intersections of queerness and criminality, but also to interrogate their mutually analogous relationship in which one concept often mirrors the other. Criminality may not always manifest as abject or as transgressive, but because it consistently appeared as such in Genet's works, I conform to this understanding of the term over the course of my readings.

Criminal queerness adheres to the definition of queer abjective desire outlined in my introduction, for it has no loyalty to body types or orientations. In the two works treated here, it surfaces in men, women, and children, as well as in a host of different sexual nonce taxonomies. And as is true in the other chapters in this project, the abject contributes to a solidified subjectivity. In the texts presented here, however, the abject achieves the collective subjectivity of two communities. In *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, gay male prostitutes and petty thieves in Paris' bohemian, World War II-era neighborhood of Montmartre, compromise the first of these communities. The group features the feminine *tantes*, whose transgressive gender expression defies social acceptance, and the hyper-virile thieves, whose own excessive sexuality can be read as code for criminality. The group is composed most specifically of a pimp, his transfigure lover, and his illegitimate, gay, violent son. In *Le Balcon*, Genet presents a household of queer heterosexuals, chosen to stabilize a revolution by sacrificing queer emulations of legal and moral officials for the real positions. Each of these communities challenges and is challenged by the regulatory processes of society at large and work, through criminal and sexual acts of rebellion, to remain intact.

[20] See White, Ch. 3.

And like any good revolutionaries, Genet's characters require some sort of arsenal. Grace Russo Bullaro reminds us that Genet "used his homosexuality as another weapon against a society that he considered both corrupt and unjust" (74), but it is the anti-social, abjective desire with which he infuses his characters, homo- and heterosexual alike, that becomes the true apparatus of textual revolution in these works. It is the desire within humans acting as vehicles of the abject's powers, that truly revolts. Society, as the normalizing and dominant force, cannot be abject, but human retaliation to its oppressive norms is, for Genet, not only abject, but revolutionary. Reading Genet, Bataille has written of the literary rebellion he observes in Genet's writing, writing that the former finds ways to intentionally resist communication:

> la *dignité* dont il s'agit est à l'opposé de la dignité commune, la dignité de Jean Genet est la "revendication du Mal." Il ne pourrait donc dire […] "notre société est abjecte." Pour lui, la société n'est pas *abjecte* […] c'est lui-même: il definirait justement l'abjection par *ce qu'il est*, par ce qu'il est passivement–sinon fièrement. (*Madame Edwarda* 66)

Abjection becomes another tool by which patriarchal norms might be toppled. David Houston Jones, observing Bataille as the author observes Genet, reminds us that "Genet's concern is the response of the individual subject to oppressive social predicaments: the ambiguity in the closing sentence is highly appropriate to the elevation of the apparently passive to a powerful means of liberation" (67). Genet's textual revolution arrives in a series of transgressive, subversive, criminal acts, perpetrated by his cast of characters, that defy, rather than resolve, these social predicaments.[21]

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[21] Bataille's comments here suggest far more support for Genet than others have previously perceived. François Bizet claims that Bataille's critique of Genet's lack of communication, executed over the course of the chapter of *La Littérature et le mal*, entitled simply "Genet," is

Criminality, not simply in the ethical and legal senses, but especially in terms of manipulation, deception, and the transgression of societal boundaries between the normal and the obscene, colors the sexuality of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon*. Behaviors culturally sanctified as normative within these texts by comportment not intended to fulfill such norms but to disrupt them. Thus, these two texts an advance my inquiry into abjection and desire. Each of them, one a novel and the second a play, depict a community of subversiveness: a group working, either actively or passively, at distancing themselves from normative affirmations and relocating somewhere that the group is either exempt from dominant culture, or immune to it.

The representations of Catholicism, social and political law (each of these an institution against which Genet was reacting), and language together form the collection of dominant institutions that these criminal behaviors violate, and against which they rebel. As Grace Russo Bullaro has written, Genet's "hatred and rebellion are aimed at the smug bourgeois, who for him embodies all the oppressive conservative values of his society: marriage, family, religion, patriotism; hence, his choice to express himself in the classic French prose of the class that he is targeting" (74). Policing of the gendered body is also challenged, especially in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, where Bullaro identifies that the femininity of Divine, the avant-garde, transfigure of the text, is used as a tool of revolution. Divine is ahead of the curve in gender expression, living almost entirely as a woman without surgically altering her body: "Genet's portrait of femininity, the drag queen, unimpeded by simultaneous admiration and rejection, is more singular in its function of protest and subversion" (78).

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performed with "some irritation. Bizet's criticism is myopic, failing to see that Bataille's observation that Genet does not "communicate" means only that he fails to behave. In this regard, Bataille instead seems to admire Genet's resistance.

Indeed, Divine cannot be cleanly codified as a gay man: her persistent public appearance as female and the maternal role she eventually fulfills with Notre-Dame classify her as female and even heterosexual, but never heteronormative. She should not be mistaken as a man who attempts to pass, seamlessly and without recognition, as a woman. Her appeal lies in the anti-social properties of failing to pass. Unlike Ben Jelloun's cast of characters that pursues Zahra (who both fails at and succeeds at passing as a man) because her physical presentation incites confusion and disgust, tangibly abjective qualities do not provoke Genet's figures. Rather than being drawn by an abject that can be seen, they are magnetized by an abject that can only be understood to be socially subversive and thus required in order to motorize their rebellious and criminal acts.

Such violations produce not only new subjectivities free from social regulation, but also new communities of subjectivities that share as a common bond their revolution. In this chapter, then, I read Divine as a transfigure—even as a straight queer figure, a man living as a woman who exclusively pursues relationships with men. She exists ahead of her times, as she tenuously and unabashedly passes as a woman with no seeming investment in surgically altering her male body.[22]

[22] Michael Lucey, whose reading of Divine we will study in detail later in this chapter, has said of Divine:

> [W]hen we read Notre-Dame as a character who breaks open a rigidly structured system of sex roles to which Divine seems irrevocably attached, I don't think we would best construe this as a progressive movement toward a more friendly, brotherly, versatile erotic future, in which Divine endures as a relic of a surpassed queer erotic formation. (101)

3.1 KRISTEVA IN GENET

Lawbreaking is inherent to abjection, as Julia Kristeva points out by relating language to law. She situates the abject within the myth of Œdipus:

> If rituals are called upon to purify it, it is nevertheless in the *sayings* of Œdipus concerning divine Law as well as Theseus that it is assumed. It has nothing to do with confessing a sin; abjection, in a Greece in the process of becoming democratic, is taken over by the one who, through speaking, recognizes himself as mortal […] and subject to the symbolic.
>
> A bridge has been built toward another logic of abjection: it is no longer defilement to be excluded ritually as the other facet of the sacred (social, cultural, one's own) but *transgressive* due to a *misreading* of the Law. (*Powers of Horror* 88)

These "misreadings," intentional in their transgressions, inform my approach in this chapter to the abject. I do not investigate *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon* for the physical presence of the abject (in the shape of violence, rape, or decay, for example), but rather for the more abstract qualities that motive non-lawful (in both the social and the legal sense) transgressions as well as the sexual desire incited in Genet's characters. She claims that behaviors that cause no physical harm but are harmful in other ways are also abjective—criminal acts, exploitation and trickery all fall within these parameters. The Kristevan abject applied in Chapter One derives from the same definition useful for understanding Genet's thematic criminality, but this passage clarifies that the abjection of criminality lies in its subversiveness:

> [It] is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior […] Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law–rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. (*Powers of Horror* 4)

Thus, Zahra's body can be seen as criminal, seditious of the normative gender expression of Islam and Moroccan culture. Her illicitness is bound in metaphor but is represented in actual physical and corporeal attributes. Though the physicality of Divine's complicated gender sedition cannot be denied, most of the text's sources of abject desire originate from abstract constructions of transgression, rather than presentations of the abjectly repulsive or terrifying.

3.2 THE ABSTRACT ABJECT, OR GENET VERSUS JOUHANDEAU

Because the specific abject at work in Genet is different from the physical abjections that arise in Chapters One and Four, abjective desires in Genet are the most abstract to be examined in this dissertation. But subtle though they may be for this project, Genet's abjection is in fact

more physical than Marcel Jouhandeau's, a French writer with whom Genet shared a little known and rocky friendship. Jouhandeau's text *De l'abjection* is the earliest French text in the twentieth century to openly theorize the notion, but it is not clear what influence, if any, his work had on Genet's.

Introduced by mutual friend Jean Cocteau, the two shared occasional meetings that were always brief and unpleasant, and this tension renders it difficult to discern to which degree his acquaintance's work bore an impact on Genet's. Biographer Edmund White relates their first encounter:

> In their first talk together Genet impressed Jouhandeau by declaring, "Prison isn't prison, it's escape, it's freedom. There you can escape the trivial and return to the essential." The next day, when Genet visited Cocteau, he found his host engaged on the telephone, but he spoke to Jouhandeau, who was also present. He assured Jouhandeau that he was now eager to abandon his life of stealing and to support himself through writing. Jouhandeau responded, "My friend, it's certain that you have some talent, but don't make a profession out of it or you will spoil everything. If you want to believe me, you should continue to steal."
>
> Several months later Jouhandeau received a message sent from Genet, who was now again in prison: "Since, Monsieur, you are the one responsible for the fact that I am a prisoner because I've followed your advice, that I am thirsty, hungry, cold and that I don't have a cent, I would be grateful to you if you could satisfy all my needs." Jouhandeau tore up the letter, and his wife phoned Cocteau to reproach him for introducing them to such a person. (ch. 8)

This exchange appears to show Genet "out-abjecting" his colleague by proving that his genuine experiences with physical suffering trump Jouhandeau's more amateur and "soft" experiences with abjection, a point nicely demonstrated even through his wife's protective phone call on his behalf. We can imagine that if his work influences Genet's at all, it was as motivation to compose texts that feature more, and more explicit, physical anguish.

Jean-Paul Sartre would tend to agree, making it clear that Genet is by far the more "abject" author of the two:

> [Genet] cannot, like Jouhandeau, divert himself by playing a double game: there is only one game. He cannot take advantage of the age-old conflict between God and men, he cannot go from the latter to the former the way a child utilizes marital discord to set his parents against each other in order to get from one what the other refuses him. There are only men. All the pious frauds of whom we have spoken thought they had their absolute existence in God. The more Jouhandeau destroys himself here below, the more he re-creates himself in Heaven. Genet's *only truth* comes to him from men. Thereby the absolute drops back to earth. No angel will wipe away the spit with which he is covered, no eternity of glory will challenge his present wretchedness. This world has no underside; in this world, sufferings are inexpiable, ineffaceable. The pettiest of disgusting experiences that he has to put up with is an infinity that crushes him, since he knows that nothing will compensate for it. Jouhandeau, who is highly integrated into religious society, works himself into a good position and manages to live in it. I do not doubt that his anguish is unbearable, but the fact is that it takes place all in his head. Before 1942 I never met anyone who did not esteem

> him; he was a respectable person, just like the surrealists. Genet, who is excluded from secular society, suffers in his flesh. If he really commits acts of betrayal, he will be beaten up or stabbed. The destitution is therefore real: he deprives himself of *all* love. The humility is entire: men scorn him and he knows no judge to whom he can appeal. (232)

For Sartre, the theoretical relationship between the two men begins with and ends with this very specific difference: Jouhandeau's shame originates in religion and therefore exists in abstract terms, while Genet's suffering—disease, assault, imprisonment—is far more physical, and therefore, for Sartre, more real.

3.3 PREVIOUS PURCHASES MADE IN GENET

To study abjection in Genet suggests, then, that we are studying parts of his own explicitly abjection biography. But while Genet's abjection is comparatively the more graphic, in the texts examined here—*Notre-Dames-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon*—it is featured in more abstract terms. Though sexuality and criminality as simple themes themselves are explicit in his works, the abject desires they produce are finer and more understated than the abject examples I have previously examined. Indeed, Genet himself enforces the possibility of abjection as queerness by calling attention to its disembodied and sentimental state, rendering these works, contrary to other analyses, open to many more avenues of abstract queerness than simply the physical acts between same-sex bodies. Elizabeth Stephens perceives a rebellious and abstract queerness present within Genet's texts, but she sees it largely as related to language and language's attempts to "represent homoerotic experiences and desires" (*Queer Writing* 4) from

within a system already heteronormatively codified and therefore lacking power and substance: "[In Genet], we find what is still one of the most detailed accounts of the difficulties of writing homoerotically within a language that is itself inherently heteronormative" (5). Genet, for Stephens, pre-dates the sexual and morphological connection of embodiment to writing articulated by Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. Yet, though Stephens dedicates ample analysis to Genet's homoerotic writing, she fails to consider the supple heterosexual, though non-heteronormative, trends at work in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*. She misses that Genet dismantles heterocentrism not by writing "homoerotically," but rather by writing "abjectively" and introducing readers to the sentiment (not the sex or gender) that motivates currents of desire.

But though Genet's figures are explicit in their guilt, their crimes are not limited to the obvious physical transgressions of murder or theft. The boundaries of regulated sexual behavior dissolve in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon*, each text boasting a sexuality rooted in a desire for abstract anti-social acts and sentiments within a community that supports this sexuality. The question of the abstract abject is raised by Leo Bersani's query, "Should a homosexual be a good citizen?" (113), to which he ultimately responds by concluding that Genet's gay characters are exempt from citizenship not for their strenuous resistance to lawfulness, but for their refusal of its entire system:

> Genet's use of his culture's dominant terms (especially its ethical and sexual categories) are designed not to rework or to subvert those terms, but to exploit their potential for erasing cultural relationality itself (that is, the very preconditions for subversive repositionings and defiant repositions). (153)

Bersani's analysis of Genet's *Pompes funèbres* reveals that the anti-ethical sentiment of betrayal, a feeling reliant as much upon one party's trust as it is another party's manipulation, characterizes the text's homosexuality. Abjection and homosexuality conflate in this definition of the lie.

Genet wishes not to overturn the system he criticizes, but to disrupt it. Bullaro claims that, by using homosexuality as an abstract weapon of rebellion, he "wishes to discredit what he clearly believes to be hollow and vicious devices of patriarchal manipulation" (77). Homosexuality, in fact, becomes a weapon not (or not only) as a challenge to patriarchal forms of heterosexuality. Its violence is contained in an opposing set of anti-social values, gleaning its moral quality and erotic quality from disloyalty. Bersani claims:

> For Genet, homosexuality has to be implicated in betrayal once the latter is erotically charged. It would be convenient to separate the two (to take the homosexuality without the betrayal), but this reassuring move would miss Genet's original and disturbing notion that homosexuality is congenial to betrayal and, further, that betrayal gives homosexuality its moral value. (153)

Sex is not without treachery in *Pompes funèbres*, but Bersani's analysis is incomplete without extending this practice of Genet's to other works, in which erotic and very intentionally criminal anti-social behaviors surface and re-surface. *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon* rely not only on abstract manifestations of the abject (betrayal, trickery, deception), but also on the abstraction, through fantasy, of the real crimes of theft and murder.

3.4 COLLAGE OF CRIMES AND CRIMINALS

Fuel for such imagined encounters with real crimes and criminals can be traced to Jean Genet's own incarceration in 1942, during which he composed *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, the non-dramatic work for which Genet is most celebrated, and dedicated it to convicted murder Maurice Pilorge. The narrator, a lightly autobiographically enhanced prisoner called Jean, recounts the tale of the transgendered prostitute Divine, her pimp Mignon, the adolescent delinquent for whom the book is named, and their *mélange* of lovers and enemies in the Parisian neighborhood of Montmartre. I first analyze *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* for its presentation of abjective and sexual criminality. Sexuality does not exist in the text without a criminal undercurrent, making the abjection present in the acts of the lovers both physical—featuring sexual acts and sexualized bodies—and abstract—featuring the abstract boundaries that separate the legal from the illegal. Its presence in the text serves to reinforce Genet's attempt to deconstruct the social norms of standardized sexual behaviors by weaving them with infractions of the regulated ethical acts of honesty and propriety. The social construction of the abject serves to construct the abstract nature of these abject acts.

Within this framework of defying socially sexual restriction while also, or in response to, breaking the law, we find Divine, Mignon-les-Petits-Pieds, and Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs, each offering their respective and individual criminalities. Mignon-les-Petits-Pieds (Mignon) is provocative for his thievery and sexual exploitation of his lovers, in particular of his long-time partner Divine. She desires him not only for his crimes, for the crimes in which she is implicit and exploited. Victimization tantalizes her. Divine, in turn, draws lovers to her because her primary criminal activity, prostitution, encases and showcases an additional and equally socially

subversive quality: her transgenderism.[23] Her clients pursue her not out of desire for consensual heteronormative sex, nor for consenting homosexual sex, but for the taboo of purchasing sex for sale, something illegal and especially forbidden because Divine is a gay man who lives full-time as a woman. Finally, desire (Divine's, the narrator's, Mignon's) for the young Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs is likewise born of abject desire for his murderous past, and for the incest and pedophilia in his relationship with Divine. These actions, already subversive and metaphorically seditious, are further removed from the normative systematics of Parisian and French society by their relationship to the abject. Abjective sex forms the focus of revolution within the tale, positioned to topple heteronormative paradigms of desire and supplemented by references to ethical, religious and linguistic revolutions, each intended to symbolize a challenge to the patriarchal and dominant norms of language, religion and moral law.

In *Le Balcon*, revolution in the text is far more literal, presenting a civil war that rages in the streets outside of a popular brothel in which clients pay prostitutes to engage with them in sex acts that metaphorically dismantle social order. In the second section of my chapter, I affirm that the criminality of prostitution, the mere fact that it lies beyond the borders of normative sexuality, allegorizes these acts, as the clients engage in intercourse not only with fellow literal and figurative fellow rebels, but most importantly with criminals who break the law with their prostitution both before, during and even after the text's revolution. As historian Andrew Hussey has pointed out, in pre- and post-Revolutionary Paris, the most popular literature of all was "the erotic texts that opposed all public morality in the name of freedom" (174). *Le Balcon* posits itself as just such a text. No matter the state of the nation beyond its walls, the crime of

[23] I use this contemporary term to describe Divine's complicated expression of gender as an indicator that Genet's placement of such a figure in the novel is queer prophecy. Divine is not a character that can be easily categorized as a man who desires men, nor can she be proven to be a man who wishes to become or to fulfill the normative function of a woman.

prostitution within the brothel remains intact; this particular institution continues to feature abject sexual relationships that disrupt society in the vein of the simultaneous revolution.

In fact, John Plotz has identified the physical object, naturally inanimate but rendered animate by abjective attention, as the site of the abject in Genet's texts, writing in particular about the penis, the rose, and the tube of Vaseline. Arguing against Theodor Adorno's claim in *Minima Moralia* that objects, especially abject ones, can be liberated from Saussurian systems of linguistic classification as the "signified," Plotz writes that Genet's task is not to showcase the abject through physicality as a means of freedom from that system:

> His work achieves the sort of inversion that allows objects to emerge into a more-than-systematic life as they reenter systematic flatness. His novels *enact* what could never directly be addressed in strictly philosophical writing: both the desire of an object to climb free of its system and, simultaneously, the striking affirmation of the language-system's guiding principle of "difference"…*in the moment of turning from the system, the strongest possible affirmation of the system*. (103; emphasis in original)

Plotz claims that the abjection of queerness reifies the binaries it opposes. Despite the fact that *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* does not present examples of straight queer theory that I discuss in Chapters One and Four, it nevertheless distinguishes abjective homosexual sex as unique and non-normative. For instance, Divine's queerness is not homosexual, but though she lives as a woman, her sexuality is not that of a biological female. *Le Balcon*, nevertheless, presents a series of heterosexual, but decidedly non-heteronormative, encounters that distinguish themselves from such normativity by their abjective motorization. Both texts position abject sexuality as a tool of social revolution in a foreground of criminal behavior and imprisonment, with insurgencies

against the patriarchal authorities of language, religion, and social law occurring in the background. In these two texts, the abjective lust for criminal and subversive acts makes abjective sex not about object choice, but abject choice.

3.5 CRIMES OF LAW, SOCIETY AND GENDER

Finally, I turn to the text. Readers meet the incarcerated narrator that is Jean straightaway, and that is precisely where the facility in reading the text ends. Because *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* is enigmatic not only in content but in form (the text is notoriously hard to follow, and Genet switches between characters and concepts with no warning) let me begin by indicating where my argument will take us. My investigation of abstract examples of abjection and of criminal and sexual acts symbolizing low-level revolution remains consistent throughout, but I begin by examining the narrator's intense erotic interest in all things abject, a passion so keen that he can barely keep from masturbating. I then study his sexual interest in the real (or imagined) Mignon and Divine, for he sees them as the abjective *couple d'amants idéal*. My focus then repositions on Divine, whom I examine first a transfigure, then as a part of a dysfunctional family unit that includes her attraction to Notre-Dame, depicted here as a child, as her son, as her competition for lovers, and as a lover himself. My analysis evolves into my understanding of Divne as a mother, analyzing more closely her feelings for Notre-Dame, and then as a child who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of a neighbor boy. My analysis of the novel concludes with my close reading of young Notre-Dame's criminal acts and the regulatory court process that convicts him for murder.

The narrator of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, does not permit the novel to travel further than the first few lines of text before he introduces the criminal element present in his desire. This passage is significant as Genet clearly maps out not only that criminality is a subject of fascination and obsession, but that these carry with them a sexual response. Jean does not describe the murderer, Eugen Weidmann, to whom he is drawn as much as he clarifies that he is so obsessed with Weidmann that he was compelled to clip his picture out of a newspaper. Weidmann is not alone—there are others that have caught Jean's attention, as well:

> Weidmann vous apparut dans une édition de cinq heures, la tête emmaillotée de bandelettes blanches, religieuse et encore aviateur blessé […] Sous son image, éclataient d'aurore ses crimes: meurtre 1, meurtre 2, meurtre 3, et jusqu'à six, disaient sa gloire secrète et préparaient sa gloire future.
>
> Un peu plus tôt, le nègre Ange Soleil avait tué sa maîtresse.
>
> Un peu plus tard, le soldat Maurice Pilorge assassinait son amant Escudero pour lui voler un peu moins de mille francs, puis on lui coupait le cou pour l'anniversaire de ses vingt ans, alors, vous vous le rappelez, qu'il esquissait un pied de nez au bourreau rageur.
>
> Enfin, un enseigne de vaisseau, encore enfant, trahissait pour trahir: on le fusilla. Et c'est en l'honneur de leurs crimes que j'écris mon livre. (9)

This excerpt illustrates both the limitations and freedoms of Jean's sexual desire—he lusts only for those who violate social order, but any variety, either political or social, of such violation enchants him. Ange Soleil's black skin announces his position at the margins of white European society; and the midshipman commits the crimes of an adult while still legally a child. While all

parties are guilty of murder, bloodshed is not enough for Pilorge, who enhances his bloodshed with thievery.

Weidmann's crimes are extraordinary, however. The last man to be executed publicly in France in 1939, he was a violent German murderer whose case drew international attention, but it is not for his notoriety that the character of Jean is drawn to him. Rather, Weidmann's murders seduce Jean from the pages of the newspaper with their gory details. And Jean is not satisfied simply staring at the murderer's image. Conjoining it with printed description of his six murders completes Jean's attraction to the picture, where he finds Weidmann's violence to be *sa gloire*. Their crimes printed and described in the text of a newspaper form the first instance of defiance in the novel; the tool of the newspaper, used to control the distribution of information, displays the details of the ultimate legal infraction.

Maurice Pilorge, to whom the novel is dedicated, elicits especially explicit description from the narrator, who elaborates the violence exacted on Pilorge as punishment for his own violence. The abjective draw of criminal conduct is especially Kristevan as Jean discusses the final criminal, insisting that this figure's appeal lies in that he *trahissait pour trahir*. Unlike the other three criminals, whose violent acts have been made clear, this final figure, intended to represent young murderer Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs, provokes Jean's desire simply because he betrays. Genet uses "trahir" in this instance as a euphemism for the transgression of the legal distinction between adult and child. *Encore enfant,* the midshipman betrays not only the political law of murder, but also the religious edict that "thou shalt not kill," all while not yet having achieved enough years to make him a "legal" adult.

The anti-social background of such parties entices Jean, who describes the immediate sexual reaction elicited by their abject criminality:

> Ces assassins maintenant morts sont pourtant arrivés jusqu'à moi et chaque fois qu'un des ces astres de deuil tombe dans ma cellule, mon cœur bat fort, mon cœur bat la chamade, si la chamade et le roulement de tambour qui annonce qu'une ville capitule. Et s'ensuit une ferveur comparable à celle qui me tordait, et me laissa quelques minutes grotesquement crispé, quand j'entendis au-dessus de la prison l'avion allemand passer et l'éclatement de la bombe qu'il lâcha tout près. (11)

Immediately aroused, Jean associates the criminal objects of his desire with the war that is taking place around him. His arousal piqued by these murderers, and rather than immediately investing in a sexual fantasy involving them as partners, he envisions the violence of war. It is of note that World War II, devastating and unthinkably cruel as it was, can be defined in simple terms as a dramatic attempt (and resistance) at the re-coding of Western society. Though Genet should not be read to have been sympathetic with the Nazi cause, the social revolution the Nazis endeavored to impose can represent the mechanics of criminality on a mega level. He shared political sympathy with the Black Panthers, the Algerians, and the Palestinians. Each of these groups inspire fear not only for their violence, but also for espousing a decidedly anti-social rhetoric that proposes an upheaval to standing social and legal practices. He was seemingly more interested in the original, micro-level move the Nazis were making toward power than the eventual Fascist mass murder they committed once they had achieved it.

There exists a fraternity that stimulates Jean's sense of self; his draw to their abject criminality is a connection to his own:

> J'explore la surface des murs, à la recherche de la trace fraternelle d'un ami. Car je n'ai jamais su ce que pouvait être au juste l'amitié, quelles résonances elle leur mettait au cœur et peut-être sur la peau, l'amitié de deux hommes l'un pour l'autre,

> en prison je désire quelquefois avoir une amitié fraternelle, mais toujours pour un homme […] J'attends sur le mur la révélation de quelque secret terrible: meurtre, surtout, meurtre d'hommes, ou trahision d'amitié, ou profanation des Morts, et dont je serais le tombeau resplendissant. (84)

Jean romanticizes war crimes and murder, his admission that he senses a magnetic pull toward trickery (an illustration of abject criminality at work in the text). His wish to wait *sur le mur* positions the wall as mirror, as if staring at the criminals posted there is a glance at his own reflection.[24] The natural outcome of such self-consideration is masturbation, to which the fantasy must ultimately turn:

> La nuit, je les aime et mon amour les anime. Le jour, je vaque à mes petits soins. Je suis la ménagère attentive à ce qu'une miette de pain ou un grain de cendre ne tombent sur le parquet. Mais la nuit! La crainte du surveillant qui peut allumer tout à coup l'ampoule électrique et qui passe sa tête par le guichet découpé dans la porte, m'oblige à des précautions sordides afin que le froissement des draps ne signale mon plaisir; mais mon geste, s'il perd en noblesse, à devenir secret augmente ma volupté. Je flâne. Sous le drap, ma main droite s'arrête pour caresser le visage absent, puis tout le corps du hors-la-loi que j'ai choisi pour mon bonheur de ce soir. La main gauche ferme les contours, puis arrange ses doigts en organe creux qui cherche à résister, enfin s'offre, s'ouvre. (15)

Jean's fear of, as well as his heightened sexual arousal at the possibility of, being caught by the prison guard as he makes figurative love to his criminals reflect the Foucauldian panopticon at

[24] The role of the glory hole in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* presages Genet's use of the same tool in his 1950 short film *Un Chant d'amour*. Here, a violent and voyeuristic prison guard envies the desire shared between two prisoners, who share cigarette smoke through a straw inserted through a hole in the wall between their two cells.

work in regulation of sexual, and social, behavior. Masturbation defies the social code of (heterosexual) lovemaking with a partner, but fantasizing about criminals while incarcerated and then re-incarcerated robs imprisonment of its punitive function. Jean's desire defies categorization, as it is for the criminal, his lover *hors-la-loi*, a breaker of boundaries, not merely for the man or for the male. Though he experiences same-sex desire, as he is a man that desires another man, maleness does not motivate Jean's lust. The object of his attraction may be male, but only abjection produced by criminality colors that maleness as desirable.

Genet's use of *geste* appears in this passage for the first time in the novel, referring here to the physical gesture of manual masturbation. Though often used as a sexual euphemism, *geste* becomes Genet's instrument for designating a motion or a movement that symbolically opposes social norms.[25] Rather than defining these *gestes*, Genet leaves them vague, implying that their value cannot be described using a linguistic system of signs and signifiers.

Standardized social systems of all kinds form an enemy against which Genet's characters revolt. Jean's appetite for prisoners mirrors his appreciation for life in prison, for an alternate reality, defying the disciplinary function of imprisonment within French society. He relishes the lifestyle behind bars and thrives in its environment:

> Je crois au monde des prisons […] ne vouloir pas être beau: vouloir autre chose. Employer un autre langage. Et se croire tout de bon emprisonné pour l'éternité. C'est cela 'se faire une vie': renoncer aux dimanches, aux fêtes, au temps qu'il fait. Je ne fus pas frappé d'étonnement quand je découvris les habitudes des prisonniers ces habitudes qui font d'eux des hommes en marge des vivants. (206)

[25] The *gestes* foreshadow *Un Chant d'amour*, where masturbation becomes the defining characteristic of imprisonment.

Jean's wish to renounce the outside world includes his wish to renounce the patriarchy, represented here by Genet's reference both to *langage* and to the Catholic significance of *éternité*, *dimanches* and religious *fêtes*. Abjection is a community of cast-offs by which these social regulations are defied and redefined. As Judith Butler reminds us in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, "the notion of *abjection* designates a degraded or cast out status within the terms of sociality" (243). Imprisonment is the ultimate marginalization of a population from which redefinitions can be forged. Thus, foremost among the *habitudes* that Jean wishes to adopt are masturbation and a sexual magnetism toward the criminal body. Both desires break social code: masturbation defies Catholic edict (a point of contention for Genet), and sexual desire for the criminal removes him from the margins and redefines his crimes as seductions.[26]

Thus, from Jean's early textual descriptions of criminals, prisons, and masturbation, two features are established: the incarceration of the narrator Jean, who likely represents Genet, and intense sexual scrutiny of the criminal. Jean/Genet begins his tale of Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs not at the beginning, but rather, somewhere in the middle. Instead of telling readers immediately of his young protagonist, he describes the couple that will eventually befriend and seduce the adolescent.

3.5.1 Friends on the Outside: Divine and Mignon

As far as Divine is concerned, Jean begins the story with the end, with her end: "Divine partait comme l'eût désiré, selon la fantaisie et l'abjection mêlées" (36). Divine's relationship

[26] Over the course of this chapter, I refer to the Catholic Church as an institution that Genet perceived to be quite worthy of his resistance. For him, the Church was very much a regulatory power in the function and surveillance of human sex and sexuality, and my references to this religious institution are in relation to Genet's personal investment in challenging their edicts. For the author, it was a defining factor in analyzing sexuality.

with abjective sex and sexuality obliges her to die, reminding readers of Georges Bataille's philosophy that sexuality and death, both territories policed by religion and law, are intricately connected. Though Bataille's philosophical analysis of their connectedness, *L'Érotisme*, would not be published until 1957, his short story *Madame Edwarda* precedes *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* in publication by just two years (1941). *Madame Edwarda* introduces a prostitute who, quite like Divine, is sentenced to death from the onset of her sexual connections with a client. The two prostitutes experience the inescapability of death at the hands of sex, Bataille explaining in *Madame Edwarda*:

> Un ensemble de conditions nous conduit à nous faire de l'homme (et de l'humanité), une image également éloignée du plaisir extrême et de l'extrême douleur: les interdits les plus communs frappent les uns la vie sexuelle et les autres la mort, si bien que l'une et l'autre ont formé un domaine sacré, qui relève de la religion. (6)

Quite literally born to die, Genet even describes Divine's decidedly queer childhood as the tragic precursor to her queer adulthood. There exists a "fil qui devait conduire Culafroy-Divine, selon une fatalité supérieurement agencée, à la mort" (372). Even in the chronology of storytelling, Genet's insistence that the tale begin in the middle suggests defiance to dominant structures of time passage, and the interconnectedness of sex and death suggests not that life begins in birth, but rather in the baptism of sexuality.

The narrator remembers first her death from tuberculosis and the entrance of Mignon, her pimp, at the funeral ceremony that followed. The elegance of Mignon's first entrance does not immediately indicate abjection, but he prides himself on the abjection of his own deceptive qualities. He gloats:

> Une gaminerie, née du dedans, l'exaltait: "J'suis un faux jeton." En descendant la rue Dancourt, ivre de la splendeur cachée, comme d'un trésor, de son abjection (car il faut bien qu'elle nous grise, si nous ne voulons pas que son intensité nous tue), il jeta un coup d'œil sur la glace d'un magasin où il vit un Mignon lumineux d'orgeuil éteint, éclatant de cet orgeuil […] une théorie de mac purs, sévèrement irréprochables, aboutit à Mignon-les-Petits-Pieds, faux jeton, et il semble que de s'être frotté à eux, de leur avoir dérobé l'allure, il les ait—vous diriez souillés de sa propre abjection, je le veux ainsi pour ma joie. (54)

The *splendeur cachée* of his abjection relates the allure of Mignon, suggesting that his criminality somehow glimmers just beneath the surface, inviting others for a closer look. Referring to it as *cachée*, as a *trésor*, reinforces the sense of burial and connects his criminal sexual appeal to interment, Jones calling the funeral "deliberately exploited to announce sexuality, founding a sense of self in the antagonistic yet mutually dependent relationship of *jouissance* and abjection's plunge of loss" (127). Mignon's *gaminerie* recalls the child criminal featured on Jean's wall of fame and its confused message of innocence and crime.

According to the narrator, Mignon's incarceration forges his personhood: "Deux séjours en prison l'ont façonné pour qu'il vive le reste de sa vie pour elle. Son destin en a la forme, et très obscurément il s'y sait voué inéluctablement' (55). He even laments not being included in a list of dangerous homosexual prisoners at the time of his imprisonment, experiencing overwhelming desire to be included among their criminal ranks: "Le seul moyen d'éviter l'horreur de l'horreur est de s'abandonner à elle. Il désira donc, d'un désir comme voluptueux, que l'un des noms fût le sien" (55). Mignon manifests, therefore, his own criminality, which cannot be separated from desire.

So completely immersed in and aroused by Mignon's crimes, Jean interrupts the story of Divine's funeral to tell of the elaborate fantasy that he creates at the mere mention of Mignon:

> Passa l'Éternel sous forme de mac […] De l'avoir évoqué suffit pour que ma main gauche par ma poche percée […] Et le souvenir de Mignon ne me quittera pas que je n'aie terminé mon geste […] Il m'apparut debout avec la gentillesse qu'il aurait pu avoir, couché nu dans un champ d'œillets. Je fus à lui à la seconde, comme si (qui dit cela?) par la bouche il m'eût déchargé jusqu'au cœur. Entrant en moi jusqu'à n'y plus laisser de place pour moi-même, si bien que je me confonds maintenant avec gangsters, cambrioleurs, macs, et que la police, s'y trompant, m'arrête […] Depuis qu'il est parti, libre, à ses vols, je retrouve ses gestes si vifs qu'ils le montraient taillé dans un cristal à facettes, si vifs ses gestes qu'on les soupçonnait d'être tous involontaires tant il me paraît impossible qu'il fussent nés de la pesante réflexion et de la décision. De lui, tangible, il ne me reste, hélas, que le moulage en plâtre que fit elle-même Divine de sa queue gigantesque quand il bandait. Plus que toute autre chose, en elle ce qui impressionne, c'est lavigueur, donc la beauté, de cette partie qui va de l'anus à la pointe du pénis. (21)

The length and dream-like rambling of this passage testifies that it is not Mignon's handsomeness that appeals to Jean, but rather, his criminal behaviors. He does not begin to describe Mignon as "passa l'Éternel sous la forme bel homme," but rather "sous la forme de mac," immediately identifying the man as part of sexual culture that destabilizes legal and social standards. Aroused by this exploitation, Jean goes on to describe that once Mignon has finished with him, the outlaw instantly and freely returns to criminal activity, to *ses vols*.

Most importantly, intercourse with Mignon permits Jean instant access to oneness with the criminality of his partner, not simply placing him in contact with *gangsters*, *cambrioleurs*, and *macs* but rendering him in fact indistinguishable from these lawbreakers. To make love to Mignon is to make love to crime itself: "Cela, c'est le portrait presque exact de Mignon, car—nous verrons encore—il avait le génie du geste qui doit me troubler, et si je l'évoque, je ne peux m'arrêter de le chanter qu'au moment où ma main s'englue de mon plaisir libéré" (23). The use of *geste* returns to reinforce that what Mignon does to and with Jean resists classification.

Jean's abjective attraction to Mignon is only possible because of having spent time imprisoned with Divine, who similarly has a criminal past. Though the narrator never actually encounters Mignon, the pimp's outlaw appeal is so great that it surpasses even the sexual criminality of the men that share Jean's prison:

> Pendant quelques secondes, dans les couloirs et dans les escaliers, je croise des voleurs, des gouapes dont le visage m'entre dans le visage, dont le corps, de loin, terrasse le mien. Je convoite de les avoir sous la main, pourtant aucun d'eux ne m'oblige à susciter Mignon-les-Petits-Pieds. (44)

Though Jean desires these other men, these desires cannot compare to his lust for Mignon. The use of *susciter* should be read as an allegory of the failure of these men to arouse (*susciter* is a synonym for *provoquer* or *éveiller*) in the manner in which he can arouse the prisoner.

These fellow imprisoned colleagues embody the flesh and blood, while Mignon remains an abstract lover for Jean; he exists either only in memories or in imagination. Because he has no lived experiences from which to draw from as he fantasizes about the criminal, Jean finds that "ce m'est une séduisante occasion de faire ici qu'il se confonde dans mon esprit avec le visage de

Roger" (44), a figure from an imagined scenario in which a group of lascivious men pursues Jean in a forest:

> Depuis deux jours à nouveau dans ma rêverie je mêle sa vie (inventée) à la mienne. Je voulais qu'il m'aimât et naturellement il l'a fait avec cette candeur qui doit n'être jointe qu'à la perversité pour qu'il m'aime. Deux jours de suite, j'ai nourri de son image un rêve qui d'habitude est repu après quatre ou cinq heures et que je lui ai donné en pâture un garçon, si beau fût-il. Maintenant je n'en puis plus d'inventer des circonstances où il saurait toujours m'aimer plus. Je suis exténué des voyages inventés, des vols, des viols, des cambriolages, des emprisonnements, des trahisons où nous serions mêlés, l'un agissant par l'autre, pour l'autre […] où l'aventure serait nous-mêmes et rien que nous. Je suis épuisé; mon poignet a des crampes. La volupté des dernières gouttes est sèche. (45)

Jean responds to the abject criminality present within Mignon with frantic masturbation, not able to satisfy himself sufficiently. Not limiting his fantasy to intercourse alone, the reverie also and most importantly includes this series of *voyages inventés*, *des vols*, *des viols*, *des cambriolages*, *des emprisonnements*, *des trahisons*, acts seemingly more erotic to Jean than the thought of intercourse itself. The mere mention of criminal behavior increases the rigor of Jean's masturbation, and he finds himself *extenué* and *épuisé* by a self-stimulation that cannot re-create the criminality that arouses him so ("je n'en puis plus d'inventer des circonstances òu il saurait toujours m'aimer plus"). Abject criminal activity enriches and enhances the sex and therefore the fantasy, breaking all the rules of social and sexual convention. Political rules of desire for the marginalized are tested here, as are the limits of space and time, as the prisoner struggles to quench desires that are provoked by imagined circumstances that he has no power to reproduce,

such impotency heightening the abjection of the scene. The citation further implies that Jean's frustrated masturbation and abject fantasy life hold sexual appeal to Mignon, who is drawn in this scenario to Jean simply for his *perversité*.

That Jean does not know Mignon but has only heard of him from Divine indicates that her own abject sexual attraction to Mignon must be powerful in order to have so imprinted this prisoner. Indeed, we find that Divine's response to Mignon shares the narrator's arousal in the face of abject criminality—their first conversation was as *badine* as it was *dangereuse* (47)—and as criminality augments her sexual desire, so is her love for Mignon enhanced. As Mignon's criminality cannot be distinguished from his personhood, it makes him immediately appealing to Divine. At the time the two meet, "Quand Divine le recontra, il sortait le matin même de prison, où il n'avait purgé qu'un minimum pour vol et recel, après avoir, froidement, donné ses complices et d'autres amis qui ne l'étaient pas" (52). Like the narrator's instant masturbatory responses to his fantasies of Mignon, Divine's own desire for him instantly overcomes her, and she seduces him:

> [T]out se passa comme il le fallait souhaiter. Divine emmena Mignon chez elle, rue Caulaincourt…
>
> Donc, avec Mignon, elle monta. Puis, dans le grenier, la porte fermée, elle le dévêtit. Le pantalon, la veste, la chemise ôtés, il apparut blanc et effrondré comme une avalanche. Vers le soir, ils se retrouvèrent emmêlés dans les draps moites et fripés. (47)

Their frantic lovemaking mimics Jean's urgent self-stimulation. Divine's impulsive seduction of Mignon imitates the response that Jean was only able to conjure up through fantasy.

Already making her living as a prostitute, she invites Mignon to her attic apartment not as her client but as her lover. After spending the night together, she awakens terrified that he might

hurt her, and so simultaneously thrilled is Divine by this terror that she invites him to move in with her:

> Par la façon qu'il a de parler, d'allumer et de fumer sa cigarette, Divine a compris que Mignon est un maquereau. Elle eut d'abord quelques craintes: être rouées de coups, dévalisée, insultée. Puis elle eut l'orgeuil d'avoir fait jouir un mac. Sans prévoir au juste ce que l'aventure donnerait, et plutôt que volontairement, un peu comme l'oiseau, dit-on, va dans la gueule du serpent, fascinée elle dit: "Reste." (49)

Of significance within this passage is Divine's fear that she will not only be *rouée de coups*, but also that Mignon might make her feel *dévalisée* and *insultée*. Her fears reinforce Kristeva's claims regarding the abstract manifestations of abject, the abject feelings and behaviors that disgust and seduce, as Mignon's criminal nature threatens to injure Divine in more than simply physical terms. Such abstraction propels abject sexuality beyond the restrictions of morphological orientations and insists upon a framework of desire that includes recondite, human emotions, such as humiliation, as the motor of sexual attraction. Mignon's appeal to Divine is thus quite intense, as he provokes within his lover a doubly abjective attraction—his criminality and her fear heighten her arousal. As the abject both magnetizes and repulses, Divine cannot help but feel *orgeuil* at having seduced the same kind of criminal that frightens her.

Though she senses his manipulation at the beginning of their romance, Divine ignores Mignon's deception, even as he continues to relish taking advantage of Divine. Like the narrator's passion for Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs, who *trahissait pour trahir*, Mignon enjoys exploiting his partner by betraying her trust: "Il n'a que peu d'amis. Comme la Divine perd les siens, lui, il les vend aux flics. Divine n'en sait encore rien: pour soi seul il conserve sa figure de

traître, aimant trahir" (52). That he "conserve sa figure de traître" for himself alone reveals that like Divine and the narrator, Mignon finds his own deception to be deeply compelling, and he thus chooses to keep it on intimate terms. The parallel foundation shared by each of these figures is not limited to homosexuality—their shared maleness does not motorize their desire—and it extends beyond male bodies to encompass the sexuality of Mignon's anti-social behaviors.

Desire for the asocial Mignon compels Jean to also consider Divine a source of abjective erotics, and the couple themselves motorize Jean's isolated arousal and masturbation. He tells of waking from a dream-like mélange of erotic imaginings featuring the duo and his own criminal behaviors:

> Ce matin, après une nuit où j'ai trop caressé mon couple chéri, me voici arraché à mon sommeil par le bruit du verrou tiré par le gâfe qui vient chercher les ordures. Je me lève et vacille jusqu'aux latrines, mal débrouillé de mon rêve étrange où j'ai pu *obtenir le pardon de ma victime*. Donc j'étais plongé dans l'horreur jusqu'à la bouche. L'horreur entrait en moi. Je la mâchais. J'en étais plein. (74)

Though he does not describe the dreamed images of Divine and Mignon, his caresses of them metaphorically enact his own masturbation. The presence of garbage enriches the abjection of the memory, and the use of *vacille* indicates that Jean does not distinguish between his fantasy of Divine and Mignon and his dream of his victim; criminality is never far from desire. That *horreur* swells within the narrator at the suggestion of being pardoned for a crime for which he does not repent highlights the importance of criminality in his erotic repertoire. He does not wish to be pardoned; such forgiveness re-positions him within the standardized limits of society he must avoid. Likening this forgiveness of his victim to a blessing from God, Jean elaborates on this horror: "car mon horreur serait immense d'être du bout du doigt désigné par Dieu,

distingué par lui; je sais très bien que, si malade, j'étais guéri par un miracle, je n'y survivrais pas" (76).

The *ordures* sought out by the prison guard predict the smell of human waste that inundates Jean's prison cell, reminding him of Divine and Mignon:

> On a tiré la chasse d'eau dans la cellule à côté. Nos deux latrines communiquant, l'eau remue dans la mienne, une bouffée d'odeur un peu plus me soûle, ma verge dure s'est prise dans mon caleçon et au contact de ma main libérée bute contre le drap qui se bosselle. Mignon! Divine! Et je suis seul ici. (77)

Abjection, even the non-criminal variety, characterizes his desire for them, and associating them with excrement reminds him that the couple is more than just a figment of his sexual imaginings. Divine and Mignon are two living beings that exist beyond and outside Jean, as abstract as the obscure sentiments of abjection itself, situated at the very Kristevan border of abjection that separates Jean from everything around him:

> These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drops so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit…[D]ung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be. (*Powers of Horror* 4)

Like criminal acts, and like the punitive social position of imprisonment, abjection is often a question of borders and frontiers that delineates the "here" from the "there." Human waste within the Kristevan model of abjection thus serves to remind of and to reinforce the realness of

Divine and Mignon as their reality nourishes Jean's complicated fantasy life and frenetic masturbation. The couple reifies the abstraction of the anti-social abjection.

3.5.2 Divine

The materialization of the abjection inspires envy within Jean, as he spies something within the union of Divine and Mignon that stirs his high regard and jealousy, respectively: "Divine et Mignon. C'est selon moi le couple d'amants idéal. De mon trou d'odeur noire, sous la laine râpeuse des couvrantes, le nez bien dans la sueur et mes yeux écarquillés, seul avec eux, je les vois" (87). Differently than in other fantasies that begin with Jean's desperate eroticizations, this passage reflects his admiration for Mignon: "Mignon est un géant, dont les pieds courbes couvrent la moitié du globe, debout […] Il trique. Si fort et calmement que des anus et des vagins s'enfilent à son membre comme des bagues à un doigt. Il trique" (87). His desire for Divine mingles with his desire to be her, to be with Mignon: "Divine: c'est mille formes séduisantes par la grâce sorties de mes yeux, de ma bouche, de mes coudes, de mes genoux, de je ne sais où. Elles me disent: 'Jean, que je suis contente de vivre en Divine et d'être en ménage avec Mignon.'" (88). Jean locates this desirous covetousness and respect within the framework of the nation-state of France (and its social and cultural normative practices) as a means of suggesting revolution. He envisions Mignon as the German troops overtake the city of Paris during World War II: "Si fort et si calmement que sa virilité observée par les cieux a la force pénétrante des bataillons de guerriers blonds qui nos enculèrent le 14 juin 1940" (87). Imagining Mignon as the ultimate criminal, the Nazi, signifies not Jean's deep sexual desire for the criminal and the dangerous, but also represents the destruction of borders surrounding socially acceptable sexual behaviors. Likewise, he imagines Divine to be Marie-Antoinette: "Divine est comparable

à Marie-Antoinette qui emprisonnée, selon mon histoire de France, bon gré mal gré, dut apprendre l'argot florissant au XVIIIe siècle et s'exprimer avec. Pauvre chère Reine!" (89). This passage is fraught with social tension and broken binaries. *Pauvre chère Reine* suggests an intimacy with and a compassion for an enemy of France. That she was required to *apprendre l'argot* implies a disruption of language; this head of state did not speak the literal and figurative language of her people. To compare Divine and Mignon to the Ancien Régime and the Nazi Occupation, the most profound systematic criminal bodies of Modern French history, indicates that crime and disorder do not merely contribute to Jean's sexual arousal, they veritably compose it.

This passage proposes quite vividly the kinds of permanent, overarching structure that Jean, Divine and Mignon disassemble, structures that Genet posits extend even to the patriarchy of the nation itself. Divine especially represents anti-social sedition and, much like Ben Jelloun's Zahra, her defiant expression of gender merits additional anti-social values in the text. While Zahra occupies the role of the deject as a traveler, a circus freak and the caretaker of dysfunctional siblings, Genet permits Divine an anachronistic feminism that enables her to defy the social systems that confine her. With her body, inscribed with both the male and the female, she deconstructs limitations of gender. Her anti-social sexual desires resist the clean categorization of hetero- or homosexuality. But the "Divinariane," a section of the novel dedicated to a series of anti-social scenes and memories lived by Divine, Jean portrays her as a direct opposition to the French flag and patriotic sentiment, permitting her to embody anti-social revolution. Her transgenderism thus relates attempts at a rebellious transubstantiation not only of her gender expression, and of sexual norms, but most importantly the state of national and political regulations.

Jean launches Divine's story by announcing that her story is one of transgressive gender roles that break the barriers of normalized sex, gender and sexuality. Though she may not share Mignon's deceptiveness or the violence of Jean's murderous paramours, her criminality is no less illegal. The narrator broadcasts, "Je vous parlerai de Divine, au gré de mon humeur mêlant le masculin et le féminin et s'il m'arrive, au cours du récit, d'avoir à citer une femme, je m'arrangerai, je trouverai bien un biais, un bon tour, afin qu'il n'y ait pas de confusion" (37). He laces this passage with sarcasm, reminding readers that the confusion is not his, and not Divine's, but rather the product of a social system unequipped to decipher her gender expression. Divine mixes *le masculin* and *le féminin*; to claim that his task is simply to take responsibility for describing her. The *biais* of which he speaks refers to Divine's criminal gender and of the social impermissibility of her gender and sexuality.

During Divine's boyhood, as Louis Culafroy, the early days of her subversive gender expression earned her imprisonment in a boys' home for troubled youth, run by the state. Here, she gets her first taste of counter-patriarchal culture in an environment intended to punish infringements upon normative behaviors, mirroring Jean's experiences within the walls of Fresnes prison. Jean describes Divine's fellow "inmates" as *colons*, a colonial reference suggesting that they are subjected to normative structures of behaviors that contradict their innate decision-making:

> Ce qui faisait de la colonie un royaume distinct du royaume des vivants, c'était le changement des symboles et, dans certains cas, des valeurs. Les colons avaient leur dialecte apparenté à celui des prisons, et partant, une morale et une politique particulières. Le régime gouvernemental, mêlé à la religion, était celui de la force. (242)

The "colonists" rewrite moral law and values associated with the signs, these changing *symboles* and *valeurs*. The structures suggested here require institutionalization that it might mimic the social standardization that that occurs beyond the walls of youth homes and prisons. Such mimicry implies that it is regulation that confines and restricts movements rather than imprisonment itself. Kristeva's view of the abject insists that abjection is not simply about the breaking of rules, but also of disregarding them:

> The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them…Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the abject. (*Powers of Horror* 16)

Practices that exist outside of the youth home or prison setting are subverted, according to this framework, can be re-appropriated such that their appearance is normative. This re-appropriation creates new meaning behind actions and symbols escapes the knowledge and regulation of institution officials.

This subversive system transforms the significance of pockets. The messages transmitted by dress are codified within these walls, and transgressive though they may be, they reveal the further subversiveness of Louis' gender expression:

> Le pantalon des colons n'a qu'une poche: voilà encore ce qui les isole du monde. Une seule poche, à gauche. Tout un système social est dérangé par ce simple détail dans le costume […] Leur pantalon n'a qu'une poche, comme si on les eût amputés d'un attribut sexuel mâle—c'est bien de cela qu'il s'agit; les poches, qui

> jouent un si grand rôle dans l'enfance, sont pour nous un signe de superiorité sur les filles. (242)

The pockets signify not only dissent, but concealment. Though the pockets themselves might be visible, their contents are not. The space, like abjection, contains obscurity. These patterns in dress transmit special messages that do not exist beyond the walls of detainment; among them, a hierarchy of men over women. In the midst of subversive and codified behaviors, Louis Culafroy breaks even these laws. His gender expression, in fact, transmits a hierarchy of female over male, as he will ultimately evolve into Divine.

Inspired by the abjection of Divine's life-long seditious acts of gender and sexuality—the boy in a boys' home that wishes to be a girl and the man who lives as a woman—Jean experiences an undeniable draw to Divine. She retains a position that Jean aspires to attain; he breaks only laws, not the intimate codes of gender, and he envies her transgressive gender. Both jealousy and desire compose his attraction to her: "Mignon surtout je le chéris, car vous ne doutez pas qu'en fin de compte, c'est mon destin, vrai ou faux, que je mets, tantôt haillon, tantôt manteau de cour, sur les épaules de Divine" (77). Jean aspires to the same seditious behaviors; hence he drapes a *manteau de cour* around Divine, exalting her for her transgressive gender expression. This scene perhaps best exemplifies Jean's complicated attraction to Divine, Jean never divulging whether he desires or envies her.

Jean spies a new morality that emerges from the abjection present in the connections between the three criminals, from the abjective qualities characterizing the subversiveness of each party's respective criminality:

> Une morale naît, qui n'est certes pas l'habituelle morale (elle est à la taille de Divine), mais c'est une morale tout de même, avec son Bien et son Mal. Divine

> n'est pas par-delà le bien et le mal, là où le saint doit vivre. Et moi, plus doux qu'un mauvais ange, par la main je conduis. (77)

This passage indicates the treason present within the text and the reconstruction of social and sexual value proposed by its relationships. Genet certainly dismantles homonormative binaries by including homoerotics in his texts, but the subversiveness of the sexuality dismantles even the concept that subjects desire objects. Divine and the narrator do not respond to Mignon's handsomeness or even his maleness, but rather his abject and criminal disregard for socially sanctioned behaviors. In response, the narrator shares Mignon's attraction to Divine for her transgressive gender expression, a man living as a poorly passing woman, and her socially sanctioned sexual behaviors. *La morale* of which Jean speaks represents the dramatic reconfiguration of the family, demonstrated later with Divine's shifting relationship to Notre-Dame, gender roles, and sexual orientation posited by Divine.

Divine herself appears aware of the criminal significance of her gender, suggesting that it surpasses her petty illegal acts:

> Mais, pour se punir d'être méchante conte les méchants, Divine revient sur ses arrêts, et s'humilie devant les macs qui n'y comprennent rien. Toutefois, sa bonté va jusqu'au scrupule. Un jour, au retour du tribunal, car elle est tombée souvent, surtout pour la came, dans la voiture cellulaire, elle demande à un vieux:
>
> –Combien?
>
> Il répond:
>
> –J'ai sapé trois piges. Et toi?
>
> Elle, qui n'a que deux marqués, répond:
>
> –Trois piges. (86)

Divine has not notably been arrested for prostitution in this scene, but for petty drug selling, instead, indicating that her prostitution is not legible by traditional policing standards. Likewise, these "macs qui n'y comprennent rien" symbolize the economy of heteronormativity that characterizes a standardized sex industry, an enterprise of which a Divine is not a part.

Rather than being a sign, in fact, Divine assumes the role of the signifier, pointing toward forms of social dissent and gendered transgression that do not solidify as a sign within the text. Jean uses the Divinariane to accomplish this, suggesting in these anecdotes that Divine does not belong in any standard structure of signs and representations, as she conveys reconstructed notions of the patriarchal passage of time: "Voici un 'Divinariane' rassemblé à votre intention […] c'est au lecteur de se faire à soi-même sentir la durée, le temps qui passe, et convenir que durant ce premier chapitre, elle aura de vingt à trente ans" (78). Divine does not even age according to the prescribed passage of time. The narrator's invitation for the reader to judge her age acts as a small revolution against culturally named and measured increments of time, just as the Jacobins recreated the calendar after the French Revolution in order to slough off royalist and Catholic influences. Of the Divinariane, the following vignette relates Divine's most significant revolutionary presentation: "Quatorze juillet: partout le bleu, le blanc, le rouge. Divine, par gentillesse pour elles, méprisées, s'habille de toutes les autres couleurs" (87). Divine's display of *toutes les autres couleurs* reminds us that she symbolically opposes patriarchal heteronormativity even in its grandest forms, these other colors illustrating symbolic secession from the nation. Divine reforms time and nation, each a deeply powerful tool of social function and order, as abjection reforms the sexuality of the tale.

Jean sees both Divine and Mignon as socially and sexually seditious figures, but it is Divine whom he views as most treasonous of all. Indeed, the narrator perceives within Divine the potential to forge a new moral code that flies in the face of traditionally constructed morality:

> Lentement, mais sûrement, je veux la dépouiller de toute espèce de bonheur pour en faire une sainte. Déjà ce feu qui la carbonise a brûlé de lourds liens, de nouveaux la ligotent: l'Amour. Une morale naît, qui n'est certes pas l'habituelle morale (elle est à la taille de Divine), mais c'est une morale tout de même, avec son Bien et son Mal. Divine n'est pas par-delà le bien et le mal, là où le saint doit vivre. (78)

Love, as it exists from and for Divine, is new, not the heteronormatively predetermined and over-ascribed emotion that Genet criticizes. Abjection characterizes the sentiment, rather than the social definitions passed down from church and state.

Abjection, as a response to liminality, including criminality, can be said to characterize much of what makes Divine a desirable and a desiring figure. Born Louis Culafroy and retaining a male identity into late adolescence, Culafroy lives as Divine. Her lovers and her clients are male. While Mignon has partners of both male and female sex, Divine typically services men, making her the only seemingly heterosexual figure of the piece. Her heterosexuality lies not in passing as a woman, nor in her transidentity as a woman, but rather in the consistency by which she presents herself as a woman and by which she assumes male lovers. In fact, the narrator describes a scene in a bar in which, though dressed as a woman, Divine does not pass as such, a patron identifying her as a "pédérasque" (41). That he chooses this *jeu de mots*, *pédérasque* en lieu of *pédérast*, in description of Divine suggests her subversiveness. The entire café notices the maleness present in the appearance of this woman:

> Le café était silencieux à tel point que l'on y entendait distinctement tous les bruits. Tout le café pensa que le sourire de: (pour le colonel: l'inverti; pour les commerçants: la chochotte; pour le banquier et les garçons: la prout; pour les gigolos: 'celle-ci, etc.) était abject. (40)

Like Zahra, Divine's hybrid gender expression inspires confusion, disgust and disdain, and she becomes the abject. While parts of her gender expression may be legible, her appearance is to some extent unreadable and outside the lines of intelligible gender expression.

3.5.3 Abjection: All in the Family

Divine and Mignon's criminality flies in the face of social convention in many ways, as illustrated in the pages above, but their defiance of the traditional unit of the family is perhaps most subversive of all. Genet posits their relationship with the adolescent Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs (Notre-Dame) as familial, two parents raising child, and the circulation of abjective sexuality within the trio represents the dismantling of the family structure. This dysfunction appears in Divine's incestuous desire for her symbolic son with whom she also competes for lovers, making him a target of both her lust and of her jealousy.

Like them, Notre-Dame's criminality exists in both the legal sense, as he is a murderer, and in the social sense, as he provokes imaginings of the social taboos of both incest and pedophilia. Like his parental units, Notre-Dame inspires desire in the narrator with his subversiveness and he pictures the young man among his mural of pictures of murderers. A judge ultimately convicts Notre-Dame to death for murdering an elderly man, a murder that the boy ultimately confesses to committing because the man could not maintain an erection. Like Divine, the boy's sexuality leads to death. In addition to murder, Notre-Dame is also guilty of

sodomy and prostitution, positing him as the ultimate abject criminal. He embodies the individual criminality of each party who desires his attention so: Mignon, Divine, and Jean.

The narrator views the young man's story as inseparable from Divine's and from his own, the boy's story enriching the environment of his cell, his criminal punishment.: "[j]e veux […] refaire à ma guise, et pour l'enchantement de ma cellule (je veux dire que grâce à elle ma cellule sera enchantée), l'histoire de Divine que je connus si peu, l'histoire de Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs, et n'en doutez pas, ma propre histoire" (17). By conflating the individual tales of abject sexuality and anti-social criminality into an amalgam, the narrator positions each figure within a community of transgressive behaviors, fortifying the validity of their sexuality, motorized by abjective sentiment and anti-social action.

Nevertheless, the narrator's lust for the couple, despite the fact that it points to Notre-Dame, does not initially demonstrate the importance of the adolescent. His initial physical description, given much earlier in the book than the actual recounting of his criminality begins, but immediately prior to discussing Mignon and Divine in depth, appears almost out of place: "Signalement de Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs: taille 1,71 m, poids 71 kg, visage ovale, cheveux blonds, yeux bleus, teint mat, dents parfaites, nez rectiligne" (17). The passage seems insignificant until the narrator shares the following details about Mignon, again almost as an aside: "Signalement de Mignon: taille 1,75 m, poids 75 kg, visage ovale, cheveux blonds, yeux bleu-vert, teint mat, dent parfaites, nez rectilignes" (44). Mignon is only slightly taller and weighs slightly more than a son who was born when he himself was very young. Mignon either never becomes aware of his paternity or ignores it: "Dans sa vie ahurissante, Mignon, au courant de tout, ne saura jamais rien. Comme il ignorera toujours que Notre-Dame est son fils" (309).

Notre-Dame's presence in Mignon's relationship with Divine constructs a family dynamic, Mignon the unknowing father, Divine the jealous mother, and Notre-Dame the dysfunctional son, which results in themes of both incest and pedophilia. Though each party may be drawn to the others for legally criminal acts, the failure of this family's normativity is its greatest crime. The dysfunctionality of their small family challenges the paradigm of two married and heteronormative parents who fulfill their citizenship by producing other citizens. The absences of both a clear maternal presence and a clear father figure re-arrange traditional kinship structure.

The narrator claims that the young murderer does not share the corruption of his other fantasy lovers: "Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs n'avait rien de commun avec ces assassins dont j'ai parlé. Il était—on peut dire—l'assassin innocent" (111). Murderous acts aside, the boy's innocence is hard to ignore as Notre-Dame is introduced to Mignon as a victim of his theft, the *autenthique cambrioleur* at work. Finding the child's wallet on the ground at the Saint-Lazare train station, "Mignon compta les billets. Il en prit dix pour lui, qu'il mit dans sa poche, et tendit le reste à Notre-Dame, éberlué. Ils devinrent amis" (114). There is no transition between Notre-Dame's witnessing Mignon's thievery and the moment the two become friends, suggesting that Notre-Dame finds Mignon's companionship irresistible. Manipulation fathers their camaraderie.

Though Notre-Dame experiences no erotic desire for Mignon, that their connection is not one of a son and his father reinforces the power of abjective attachments, even those with no sexual component. Criminality compels Notre-Dame to seek friendship with the older man, and despite their ignorance of the special familial relationship that they share, attraction to abject criminality forges their bond. Each of them confesses something abject and criminal to the other:

> Un jour, tout naturellement, Notre-Dame avoua son meurtre. Mignon avoua Divine. Notre-Dame, qu'on l'appelait Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs. Il leur fallut à tous deux une rare souplesse pour se tirer sans accrocs des embûches posées à leur mutuelle estime. À cette occasion, Mignon fut charmant de delicatessen. (117)

Notre-Dame admits his illegal and religious transgression (we are reminded of the biblical commandment prohibiting murder), while Mignon confesses to "Divine," meaning that he confesses to a homosexual relationship with a man who lives as a woman. In both cases, each party acknowledges breaking patriarchal law: murder breaks both state and religious law, while Mignon's acts of sodomy and criminality infringe upon socially standard concepts of gender and sexuality. His confession of a homosexual, abject orientation is a companion to the boy's admission of murder. Mignon's next confession reinforces this transgression as he admits to Notre-Dame his own nickname as well as that it was given to him by men:

> –…Tu comprends, c'est des mecs qui m'ont appelé…
>
> Mignon gardait la main. Avec ses yeux, tirait vers lui l'aveu:
>
> –Ça vient, ça vient.
>
> Tout le temps de l'opération, il ne quitta pas des yeux les yeux de son ami. D'un bout à l'autre, il sourit d'un immobile sourire fixé sur sa bouche, car il sentait que, de sa part, la moindre émotion, le moindre signe, souffle, détruiraient…Il aurait cassé Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs. (118)

Intense eye contact illustrates the force of the connection that the two of them share. Mignon's stare imparts not just friendship, but the violence of their friendship, sensing early on in the text that their relationship will lead to Notre-Dame's undoing.

Where Mignon experiences no physical desire for the boy, Jean and Divine experience sexual arousal in response to Notre-Dame; the former tremendously excited, the latter only out of jealousy. The narrator frantically fantasizes about Notre-Dame and his unwitting father:

> Entremêlant ainsi dans ce rêve leurs gestes, Mignon et Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs tramaient sourdement une amitié fraternelle. Qu'il m'est dur de ne pas les accoupler mieux, de ne pas faire que Mignon, d'un coup de reins, rocher d'inconscience et d'innocence, enfonce loin, désespéré de bonheur, sa queue lourde et lisse, aussi polie et chaude qu'une colonne au soleil, dans la bouche ouverte en O de l'assassin adolescent pulvérisé par la gratitude! (117)

Their *amitié fraternelle*, though rooted in abject criminal sentiment, has no sexual component for Mignon and the boy, so Jean must create his own. He envisions the "O" shape of the boy's mouth as representative of the pair's physical pleasure, an orifice welcoming his father's member and representing his own orgasm. Jean clarifies that he cannot separate the *assassin* from the *adolescent*, but the criminality that arouses the prisoner in this passage is the imagined incest taking place between father and son.

Their love-making breaks supposed laws of nature and of familial structure, inciting what Claude Lévi-Strauss has called "the problem" of incest. The act of incest, for Lévi-Strauss, transgresses not only social law, but also the biological laws that protect humanity from extinction. It fractures, as he argues, the foundation of itself:

> Règle qui étreint ce qui, dans la société, lui est le plus étranger; mais, en même temps, règle sociale qui retient, dans la nature, ce qui est susceptible de la dépasser; la prohibition de l'inceste est, à la fois, au seuil de la culture, dans la

> culture, et, en un sens—nous essaierons de le montrer—la culture elle-même. (14)

Incest, then, the infraction capable of biologically compromising human culture, is located within sex, because sex, as he argues, always prioritizes desire over obedience. Jean's anti-social fantasy is not only guilty of inappropriate sexual and social relationships, but he also dreams of a sexuality that both denies and menaces reproduction.

Indeed, Jean's fantasy, like incest, resists being defined in relation to norms, as Michael Lucey has argued. Lucey wonders where to position the notion of fantasy within in the text, asking if it reflects only the normative structures surrounding it, or fantasy can actually break free of hegemonic restraints and point in new directions. In terms of Jean's fantasy about Mignon and his son, Lucey asks:

> What […] would be "better" about joining them in a fashion different from the "brotherly friendship" that the narrator insists is a characteristic of their relation? When the narrator says that it is "thanks to me" that the two men will not find themselves coupled in another, apparently sexier fashion, what kind of agency is he demonstrating? What degree of control does he have over his own fantasy? Finally, if this coupling is to be disallowed, why is space given to its very description? (84)

His answer to these questions points to the queerness of Jean's invitation to readers to daydream along with him, suggesting that they rely on possibilities that lie beyond the narrator and his imaginings:

> Yet even though this is the narrator's fantasy, he apparently cannot just produce any scenario he wants. Even though the characters of this novel exist only in the

> narrator's mind, even though they form his sleep, nonetheless the dreams occasioned by sleep will not provide every possibility. (85)

He situates the reader as marginal, as beyond the barriers of the text, and therefore as capable of a queerness that even he cannot achieve. Lucey's argument reinforces my claim that part of abject sexuality is, in part, composed of abstract ideas. The abstract setting of the fantasy or the dream provides rich context in which to nourish the feelings of abjection that stimulate the imprisoned narrator. Though his cell does not want for abject details, such as the smell of human waste and his collection of crime stories, Jean's dream-life, however unsatisfactory, fuels the abject quality of his relationship with his imaginary lovers.

Jean intends to make Mignon's and Notre-Dame's incest as real a part of his tale as any other, thus inviting readers to indulge the same incestuous fantasies as an attempt to solidify a sexually subversive relationship that is not present:

> Je vous laisse libre d'imaginer le dialogue. Choisissez ce qui peut vous charmer. Acceptez, s'il vous plaît, qu'ils entendent la voix du sang, ou qu'ils s'aiment en coup de foudre, ou que Mignon, par des signes irrécusables et invisibles à l'œil du vulgaire, décèle le voleur […] Concevez les plus folles invraisemblances. Faites se pâmer leur être secret à s'aborder en argot. Mêlez-les tout à coup par un soudain embrassement ou par un baiser fraternel. Faites ce qu'il vous plaira. (114)

This invitation asks readers to imagine different varieties of abjective criminality. Picturing *la voix du sang* involves envisioning a call to violence, perhaps a reiteration of Notre-Dame's murderous violence. That "ils s'aiment en coup de foudre" demands that readers imagine a romance between the father and son. Most importantly, Jean asks that readers envision that Mignon, by way of "signes irrécusables et invisibles," reveals the young thief's true nature. This

act of invisible revelation in the view of "l'œil du vulgaire" symbolizes the regulating and policing presence of church, state, and family, social structures from whom Notre-Dame, Mignon and Divine (and their sexual and social criminality) have remained stealthily illegible. Jean's wish that Mignon might *décèle* Notre-Dame suggests that the narrator wants to draw attention to their willful and revolutionary subversiveness, for it transgresses only in view of powers that can take note of it.

Around the time of Notre-Dame's arrival, Mignon commits another transgression of social law: he abandons his family. He leaves his allegorical partner, Divine, and the son whom he selected as a comrade. His departure permanently damages the heteronormative family structure and reconfigures the popular imagining of a household:

> Nos ménages, la loi de nos Maisons, ne ressemblent pas à vos Maisons. On s'aime sans amour. Ils n'ont pas le caractère sacramentel. Les tantes sont les grandes immorales. En un clin d'œil, après six ans d'union, sans se croire attaché, sans penser faire mal ni faire du mal, Mignon décida abandonner Divine. Sans remords, qu'un peu d'inquiétude que peut-être Divine ne consentît plus à le revoir. (93)

This passage conveys that these *tantes*, these men living as women and selling gay sex, abide by a different structural and emotional pattern of family. The *loi* of the family unit manifests differently in this world in which a father's abandons his wife, and in which he acknowledges that she may not wish to see him again. The capitalization of *Maison* draws attention to this typographical reconfiguration of the home, just as the capitalization of *Amour* (78) conveys a new understanding of love, representing these figures that *s'aime[nt] sans amour*. Their *Amour*,

in the case of the family as well as in the case of the couple, breaks the laws of heteronormativity.

Part of the dismantling of heteronormative familial practice is the introduction of the sexual and abject element of incest, which composes but one of the sexually subversive elements that Notre-Dame introduces to the text. For Divine, pederasty colors her draw to the boy, and of all the figures in the text, she is the most cognizant of his childhood and of the abjection present in her attraction to him. The boy's youth and abject criminal behavior cannot be untangled; he is a sodomite and a murderer in child's form, reminding Divine of the abject sexuality of her own childhood. Notre-Dame is *l'adolescent* (104), *jeune* (113), an *enfant* (117), a child about to be baptized by the murder he commits: "Il a seize ans quand il arrive au palier. Son cœur bat, car il est résolu. Il sait que son destin s'accomplit […] il a le pur sentiment mystique que ce meurtre va faire de lui, par vertu du baptême du sang: Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs" (104). But committing murder cannot change his youthfulness and child-like features, and Divine notes them in closer detail than her fellow abjective characters.

3.5.4 The Mother Divine

Divine's relationship with Notre-Dame becomes not only pedophiliac, but far more incestuous than the imagined relationship of the boy and his father, for Divine imagines the boy as her child just as she imagines him as her lover. It is also reminiscent of her own pedophiliac experiences as a young boy.[27] She finds Notre-Dame compelling for the very reason for which she cannot resist Mignon and Alberto (whom I will discuss later in this chapter)—his abject criminality. The murder, committed as part of the prostitution he uses to seduce and rob his

[27] Divine's fantasies about Notre-Dame are not only sexual; later, we will see her describe him a child, even envisioning him as her son.

elderly victim, a M. Rabon, arouses even Notre-Dame: "Il croit bondir, l'adolescent, de vallon fleuri en vallon fleuri, jusqu'à la paillasse où le vieux enfouissait son magot" (105). *Bondir* conveys Notre-Dame's unbridled joy in the face of his abject criminal acts, and the suggestion of near homonym *bandir* reminds us that sexuality and sexual arousal are never far from criminality within this text. Like the narrator, murder compels him to a frenzied and frustrated masturbation: "D'elle-même, la main de l'assassin cherche sa verge qui bande. Il la caresse par-dessus le drap, doucement d'abord, avec cette légèreté d'oiseau qui volette, puis la serre, l'étreint fort; enfin il décharge dans la bouche édentée du vieillard étranglé. Il s'endort" (107). Notre-Dame arouses himself via his criminality, enriched by the abjective arousal he experiences at the fantasy of ejaculating in his victim's mouth.

Lucey perceives an involuntary response in Notre-Dame's masturbation: "A hard-on and a hand—the careful grammar of the passage indicates—seem to do that by themselves. And the sentence carefully leaves vague the extent to which the masturbation depends on an articulated fantasy" (93). He sees the fantasy as the narrator's, rather than the young man's, and sees no connection between the sequence of *caresse* and *décharge*. Though the source of the fantasy remains rather vague, its abjective qualities of necrophilia and criminality motorize the textual power of the murder that Notre-Dame has committed.

Divine's two-fold desire for Notre-Dame manifests as a complicated combination of pedophilia for a young boy she does not know, and of incestuous desire for a boy she views as her son. Her violation of the incest prohibition reinforces the abjection of their relationship by actually denying one of the prohibition's primary rules—that the continuation of the community must necessarily be compromised: "Le rôle primordial de la culture est d'assurer l'existence du groupe comme groupe; et donc de substituer, dans ce domaine comme dans tous les autres,

l'organisation au hasard" (Lévi-Strauss 37). While Divine's crimes ignite her abjective desire, the boy's crimes perpetuate it. The group is not diminished, but instead strengthened. Indeed, at Notre-Dame's trial, in the very midst of the legal regulation of crimes and punishments, Divine testifies of her appreciation of Notre-Dame's childhood, asserting a sense of maternity for him: "Je l'ai longtemps connu, monsieur le Président, mais je peux dire pourtant que je le crois très naïf, très enfant. Je n'ai jamais pu apprécier que sa gentillesse. Il pourrait être mon fils" (341). Her claim in this court of law, this legal instrument of regulation, performs the maternal, effectively rendering Divine his mother, though it is neither true nor biologically feasible. That she does so at the boy's own trial cements the cycle of her criminal, incestuous desire for a child criminal, a cycle that begun with the molestation of her boyhood.

3.5.5 The Child Divine

It was with the thievish pedophile Alberto that Divine had her earliest sexual relationship. As Louis Culafroy, said to smile like the *dauphin*, Divine already bore the mark of the cultural revolutionary born to topple the patriarchy:

> Culafroy semblait sécréter un mystère royal. Les fils de rois sont trop fréquents parmi les enfants pour que les écoliers du village puissent prendre au sérieux celui-là. Mais ils lui firent un crime de divulguer si clairement une origine que chacun d'eux gardait bien cachée en soi, qui lésait leur Majesté. Car l'idée royale est de ce monde; s'il ne la détient par la vertu des transmissions charnelles, l'homme doit l'acquérir et s'en parer en secret, pour n'être pas trop avili à ses propres yeux. (141)

The boy's appetite for crime emerges from "lésait leur Majesté," a disruption to the social order of the school yard and a metaphor for the disruption of his eventual anti-normative sexual behaviors.

The first of such behaviors takes place between Louis, a boy, and Alberto, a young man. Divine was drawn not simply to Alberto's criminality and deception, but to the repulsion she felt when the pedophile provoked her ophidophobia by introducing snakes to their liaisons. Differently than the pedophile that grooms and seduces with pleasing gifts, Alberto understood that he must appeal to the Louis' abjective desires. Alberto asks the boy if he would care to see inside his pouch:

> –J'ouvre?
>
> –Oh! non, non, n'ouvrez pas, dit-il, car il a toujours à l'égard des reptiles cette répulsion encore plus forte que lui.
>
> Alberto n'ouvrit pas le couvercle, mais il posa sa main dure et douce, déchirée par les ronces, sur la nuque de Culafroy, qui fut sur le point de s'agenouiller…
>
> –Tu peux les toucher, elles ne te feront rien.
>
> Culafroy ne bougeait pas. Pas plus qu'à l'apparition d'un fantôme ou d'un ange du ciel, il n'aurait pas pu courir, cloué d'horreur. Il ne pouvait pas tourner la tête, les serpents le fascinaient, pourtant il se sentait sur le point de vomir. (162)

It was not to Alberto's maleness to which Louis responded, but rather his ability to disgust and frighten the child with snakes, whose phallic dimensions remind Louis of the male organ to which he is so drawn. He perches "sur le point de s'agenouiller" to fellate Alberto as he simultaneously feels "sur le point de vomir"; sex and abjective revulsion become bedfellows.

Disgust and desire solidify as potent forces in Louis', and ultimately Divine's, relationship with sexuality:

> Alberto sensible, comme sous les doigts sa verge grossir, sentait monter chez l'enfant l'émotion qui le raidissait et le faisait tressaillir. Et pour les serpents l'amitié insidieuse naissait […] Culafroy et Divine, aux goûts délicats, seront toujours contraints d'aimer ce qu'ils abhorrent, et cela constitue un peu de leur sainteté, car c'est du renoncement. (165)

In addition to the elements of the abject in Louis' relationship with Alberto, the adult/child paradigm of pedophilia and manipulation enriches Divine's sexuality: "Ils continuèrent leurs amours au milieu des vipères. Divine s'en souvient. Elle pense que ce fut la plus belle époque de sa vie" (171). It reverberates throughout her adulthood, culminating in her abjective sexual attraction to Notre-Dame. Divine eventually shares Alberto's pedophiliac desire, whose criminal abjection, according to Stephen Angelides, lies in that it is more culturally unforgiveable than unlawful.[28]

As her innocence and childhood were exploited by Alberto—"Alberto viola l'enfant de toutes parts jusqu'à lui-même s'effonder de lassitude (165)—Divine attempts to manipulate Notre-Dame through intercourse, waking him from slumber to seduce him: "Divine se coucha. Aussitôt, elle attira contre Notre-Dame, dont le corps semblé désossé, sans nerfs, les muscles

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[28] Angelides argues that, by repressing memories and knowledge of childhood sexuality, and by denying its psychoanalytic function, Western culture has cultivated a deep anxiety for pedophilia that criminalizes not only convicted pedophiles, but any figure than can be said to sympathize with these criminals. As he puts it, this visceral fear of pedophilia and of pedophiles stems from "deep-seated and unconscious anxieties about child sexuality and adult sexual desire for children, the expression of which is not just emotionally distressing, but also highly circumscribed in most western cultures" (101). The criminal weight of pedophilia is thus so heavy that its criminality extends beyond the act and the perpetrator into the community, implicating anyone that cannot or does not wish to see the pedophile penalized.

nourris de laitages […] Elle se glissa jusqu'au fond du lit, sa langue léchant au passage le corps duveteux de Notre-Dame, qui s'éveillait du désir" (269). Of all the descriptions of Notre-Dame's youth in the text, this passage reveals the most about his developing body. Even though he is an adolescent and already capable of both sex and desire, Divine's attempt to seduce him here is the product of her attraction to his "corps désossé, sans nerfs, les muscles nourris de laitages." He draws her to him not because his adolescence approaches manliness, but because his adolescence seems so childlike. His body is *désossé* and malleable, like that of a baby and its soft bones and hyperflexible joints. That he appears to Divine to be recently breastfed reminds readers that she perceives him to be not only a child, but her child. He lies in bed *sans nerfs*, a double entendre that suggests him to be both a small child without nerve and courage, and a child without the impudence to resist authority. The passage indicates the willingness of both Notre-Dame's spirit and his body to acquiesce to Divine's sexual manipulation. To say that he "s'éveill[e] du désir" implies that Divine's lust instigates his awakening, as well as that he awakes in response to his own erection. Her desire for him thrives on this manipulation, and her exploitation achieves the desired results.

> But Divine cannot bear to actually please Notre-Dame. Latent within her desire lies a jealousy of his friendship with Mignon, and she cannot bring herself to fellate him: Notre-Dame se retourna tout à coup sur le ventre, et brutalement, fit entrer avec sa main sa verge encore souple dans la bouche entrebâillée de Divine. Elle retira la tête et pinça les lèvres. Rageur, le sexe devint de pierre […] voulut forcer la bouche fermée, mais il buta dans les yeux, le nez, le mention, glissa contre la joue. C'était le jeu. (270)

Seck Gorgui, a third lover sleeping in the bed with Divine and the boy, also awakens and wishes to participate. Gorgui's arousal at watching Divine seduce an adolescent, is spurred by the curious liminality of their figures, she as a gay man living as a woman and the adolescent straddling the states of childhood and adulthood. The identities of Divine and Notre-Dame boast a certain illegibility, and like Zahra's lovers, Gorgui's own confusion arouses him. His entry into the lovemaking displaces Divine, and she cannot contain her hatred: "Elle l'eût oubliée. Mais l'insulte risquait de devenir chronique, puisque tous les trois paraissaient être dans le grenier installés à demeure. Elle haïssait également Seck et Notre-Dame, et sentait très clairement que cette haine eût cessé, s'ils ne se fussent quittés l'un et l'autre" (271). Her abjective sexual desire for him stems not only from pedophiliac lust, or from the desire to manipulate not merely a child who is figuratively her son, but also from hatred and jealousy felt for this object of her abjective desire: "Jamais Divine n'avait eu l'occasion, n'avait songé, à devenir jalouse du physique de Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs. Il y a tout lieu de croire, pourtant, que cette jalousie existait sourde, cachée" (272). He has stolen Mignon's attention and Gorgui's love-making from Divine, and her hidden and deaf jealousy prevents her from confronting the jealousy she directs toward Notre-Dame. This handicap parallels King Œdipus and the blindness he inflicts on himself so as to ignore the abject objects of his own desire. Kristeva theorizes that Œdipus' blindness, like Divine's ignorance of her jealousy, in fact inflames abjection:

> Œdipus blinds himself, so as not to have to suffer the sight of the objects of his desire and murder (the faces of his wife, mother and children). If it be true that such blinding is equivalent to castration, it is neither exiration or death. In relation to them, it is a symbolic substitute intended for building the wall, reinforcing the boundary that wards off opprobrium, which because of this very

> fact, is not disavowed but shown to be alien. Blinding is this an image of splitting; it marks, on the very body, the alteration of the self and clean into the defiled—the scar taking the place of a revealed and yet invisible abjection. Of abjection considered as invisible. (*Powers of Horror* 85)

Part of Divine's abstract abjection, then, is her insistence upon cutting herself from acknowledging the source of her jealousy, even as it provokes further desire on her part.

Notre-Dame oscillates in his sexual role from a top to a bottom throughout the text, becoming most obvious in this passage and enhancing the abjective desires that titillate Divine. Lucey reminds us that Notre-Dame's versatility dismantles the structures of homonormativity, mimicking heteronormativity in its positioning of penetrated and penetrator. He writes that "Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs everywhere threatens to cross the categories of top and bottom, categories that it would seem were essential to both Mignon and Divine in imagining themselves" (100). For Lucey, her liminality is a weapon, and he claims that "[t]his unpredictable crossing […] cultiminates in the scene […] where, in bed with both Seck and Divine, Notre-Dame gets fucked by Seck while Divine fellates him" (100). Though queer in their personal sexual expression and orientation, Divine and Mignon reflect parental roles of heteronormativity that Notre-Dame rejects in his lovemaking. Nevertheless, as Lucey correctly observes:

> [W]hen we read Notre-Dame as a character who breaks open a rigidly structured system of sex roles to which Divine seems irrevocably attached, I don't think we would best construe this as a progressive movement toward a more friendly, brotherly, versatile erotic future, in which Divine endures as a relic of a surpassed queer erotic formation. (101)

I concur that Notre-Dame breaks open not only a system of sex roles, but I further Lucey's claim by contending that Notre-Dame also dismantles a system of family roles, becoming a source of competition and desire for the mother figure in this familial framework. The desire that erupts within Divine proves to be a further disintegration of a normative structure. Her arousal for the criminal abject disrupts her outwardly normative gender expression, living and working as a woman who is successfully and routinely penetrated by males, and thus repositions her as queer.

3.5.6 Judge, Jury and Execution

The final coherent scene of the novel is Notre-Dame's trial for murder, in which the social and sexual reversals proposed in the text undergo a series of victories and losses. Anti-social criminality and abject sexuality meet here to prove not only their resiliency, but to assert the power of their presence. This scene provides the most regulatory framework of the text as the themes of sexual and social revolution coalesce under the watchful eye of the patriarchal regulatory presences of judge and jury. The hegemonic authority wields much control, against which the abject sexual orientations of the novel are no match. Notre-Dame's character witnesses are the *tantes* from his Montmartre neighborhood, whose queer *noms de guerre* are stripped in the face of the legal surveillance: "Notre-Dame vit entrer Mimosa II. L'huissier avait crié pourtant: 'Hirsh René', puis à l'appel: 'Berthollet Antoine', parut Première Communion, à l'appel de 'Marceau Eugène', parut Pomme d'Api […] leurs noms perdaient leur corolle" (339). The relics of the murder—Notre-Dame's testimony and the presentation of the murder weapon itself—become the testimony of the reconstructed sexual dynamics proposed by the plot. Murder is proven through direct and indirect reference to abject criminal sexuality, proving in turn its power to mobilize criminal and sexual behavior.

Genet positions murder in this scene as the ultimate anti-social and abject compulsion, and its place in the procedure of a court proceeding forces the examination of its potency in anti-social behavior (defying political law) as well as in abject sexuality (defying sexual norms of safety). As much as the crime of murder is on trial, so too on trial are the rebellions of queer sexuality and anti-social personhood, represented here, as the defendant Notre-Dame.

The judge offers the necktie by which Notre-Dame strangled his victim as evidence. It represents the patriarchy's own phallus and the fear that it might be corrupted by the abject sexuality of the defendant:

> Le Président avait cette cravate molle entre les doigts, une cravate comme un ectoplasme, une cravate qu'il fallait regarder pendant qu'il en était temps encore, car elle pourrait disparaître d'un moment à l'autre ou bander roide dans la main sèche du Président, qui sentit que, si son érection ou sa disparition s'accomplissait, il se couvrirait de ridicule. (332)

The judge fears, in effect, his own physical response to the crime of murder, the necktie a symbol of his potential arousal in front of a crowded courtroom. But differently than the defendant and his community, the judge hesitates to respond to a sexually deviant stimulus, this abject criminality, and he cannot bear the consequences of social exclusion that would inevitably follow. This refusal to permit an erection insulates the judge from the abject dynamics of this courtroom, pointing to a loss for the revolutionary politics represented by the murder at hand.

A failure, rather than a refusal, to maintain an erection is what Notre-Dame reveals to be the reason for which he murders Rabon. The word *bander* chokes Notre-Dame—he cannot pronounce it—and the audience in the courtroom rejects it:

> –L'vieux foutu. Y pouvait seument peu bander.

> Le dernier mot ne passa pas les crânes petites lèvres; néanmoins, les douze vieillards, bien vite, ensemble, mirent leurs deux mains devant leurs oreilles pour en interdire l'entrée au mot gros comme un organe, qui ne trouvant pas d'autre orifice, entra, tout roide et chaud, dans leur bouche béante. La virilité des douze vieillards et celle du Président étaient bafouées par la glorieuse impudence de l'adolescent. (349)

The term is denied its power in the presence of the regulating instrument of the courtroom, but nevertheless impacts the audience in an unexpected fashion. The *douze vieillards* of the jury symbolize the twelve apostles to the *Président*'s role as Jesus Christ. Their dismissal of the spoken term is delivered to them orally, as they have blocked their ears, and into their *bouche béante*, like the body of Christ is symbolically administered through the act of communion. This delivery of the sign, signifier and signified of *bander* compromises the hegemony of language, now *bafoué* by Notre-Dame, resulting in a small conquest for abject sexual politics.

His imprisonment and his death are the boy's ultimate reward, his "tête coupée par un vrai couteau" reminding us yet again of the revolution in progress by recalling the guillotine. Notre-Dame, queer in both his anti-sociality and in his abjective sexuality, can only die because he, as Lee Edelmen would argue, the child, must be the martyr of the queerness he embodies. Genet denies him futurity, using his execution a means of queering the future. Edelmen writes about the politics of the future and its colonization by a heteronormative present, The Child affirming the normativity at stake:

> *queerness*, by contrast, figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive: place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in stigma […] [Q]ueerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to

> that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure. (3)

There exists no promissory identity for Notre-Dame in the future, and his revolution gains relevance by refusing him an adulthood chartered by normative regulation. Death liberates him not by challenging the patriarchy, but by denying it the chance to count Notre-Dame among its citizens and permitting what Edelman calls "the radical dissolution of the contract" that otherwise binds him to such citizenship (4).

Even in death, the Notre-Dame loses his role as an instrument of rebellion and is denied even a fantastical adulthood. Jean does not continue to fantasize about him even as he cannot stop imagining Divine. He returns to recounting his series of rambling Divinarianes, reassuring readers that the revolution remains in progress in Divine's posthumous spirit: "Pour Divine, commettre un crime afin de se libérer du joug des puissances morales, c'est encore avoir partie liée avec la morale. Elle ne veut pas d'un beau crime. Elle chante qu'elle se fait enculer par goût" (359). This *goût*, free from standardized morality, persists beyond her death, alive and flourishing in the queer community she has left behind.

The final commentary of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* ties the criminality of subversive sexuality to a reconstruction of Saussure's signage. In a letter written to Divine from an incarcerated Mignon, Mignon asks, "Tâche de reconnaître le pointillé. Et embrasse-le" (377). The dotted line is empty; Mignon does not leave his signature, symbolizing a hole in the chain of the sign, the signed, and the signifier. The absence of a *sign*ature, intended to represent the *sign*ifier, comprises the *sign* as the letter closes without a signifier indicating its author. Jean complicates matters further, replacing the signature with a drawing of a penis: "Ce pointillé dont

parle Mignon, c'est la silhouette de sa queue. J'ai vu un mac bandant en écrivant à sa môme, sur son papier sur la table poser sa bite lourde et en tracer les contours. Je veux que ce trait serve à dessiner Mignon" (377). The final act of the text serves to dismantle the language of the patriarchy by using a drawing of an incarcerated pimp's penis, the mark of subversive and illegal sexualities, as the signifier of Mignon and all the stories that belong to him.

The criminality of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* exists in the transgressions of its characters to challenge authority, transgressions that emerge only in studying the text's content and cast of figures. And though the text is laden with abject sexuality in relation to bowel movements, filth and death, the transgressions against social and national law provoke the protagonists' arousal and motorize the plot of the novel. The tropes of revolution in the book can be made apparent with detailed close readings, but in Genet's later work, *Le Balcon*, he moves revolution to the foreground and is careful to make readers understand the forces against whom the main characters struggle. The nation, Catholicism and heteronormativity, all institutions that represented oppression for Genet, form contexts of rebellion and foster abjective desire for the treasonous sex acts proposed.

3.6 SUBVERSIVELY SEXUAL REVOLUTION AS VIEWED FROM *LE BALCON*

In this section of the chapter, I first examine the transgressive straight queerness that takes places within the private rooms of a brothel, arguing that Genet's clients and prostitutes engage in seditious acts as analogy for the revolution that takes place in the streets outside. Next, I consider the layers of performativity present in the play as the clients and prostitutes "perform" their civic duty by holding prestigious titles after the real men and women that hold

these offices are killed in the revolution. This reading further explores the parallel between transgressive sex acts and transgressive political acts.

Genet's *Le Balcon*, which he first wrote in 1955, presents its themes of revolution with much less metaphor and much more active rebellion than the revolutionary themes in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*. A war, one mirroring Spain's civil war under Generalíssimo Francisco Franco, occurs in the streets outside the Parisian whorehouse called Le Grand Balcon.[29] The playwright does not recreate the revolutionary events of 1789, though we know that the increasingly popular production of explicitly sexual texts and pornography symbolized the revolution that was come. Historian Andrew Hussey explains that, in the eighteenth century, sexualized literature was widespread: "Most popular of all, however, with all classes of reader were the erotic texts that opposed all public morality in the name of freedom" (Hussey 174). Genet, aware of the historical revolutionary power of sex and pornography, gives readers no indication of what has generated the conflict in the streets. This lack of background detail further insulates the sexual and subversive dynamics that take place within the brothel, meaning that the reader or the audience must pay even closer attention to the acts at hand.

The crimes at work within the play, each of them sex acts, are guilty of transgressing both legal and social barriers of normative behaviors. Though revolution represents the focus of Genet's play, my analysis concentrates on the revolutionary principles in abject and criminal sex. The featured intercourse is inherently criminal; male clients solicit from female prostitutes. Not merely against the law, the sale of sex disrupts religious paradigms of marriage and family. In fact, there exists no reproductive function to the intercourse of the scenes that I interrogate

[29] The title of play and its brothel demonstrates for readers that Genet has done his homework regarding Parisian houses of ill repute. Le Grand Balcon was a well-known whorehouse on the rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs in the 18th century.

below, an obligation that must characterize the sex shared by practicing Roman Catholic couples. Furthermore, the anti-reproductive sex shared between these prostitutes and their clients greatly compromises heteronormativity at large. Heterosexual though they may be, abjection enriches the texture of the couplings of *Le Balcon* with themes of bestiality, sadomasochism, and Christian sin. As in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, the play hosts a cast of characters not motivated to couple with their desired object choice, but who are rather drawn to situations characterized by violence, dishonesty, treachery and animality.

Featured in the play are men portraying, via role-play, a Catholic bishop, a general in the French army, and a judge, representative of patriarchal positions intended to provide moral compassing that are criticized by Genet. In Georges Bataille's estimation, this role-playing contributes to the abjection of the scenes because the quality of their actions is called into question: "l'abjection dont la société est chargée est peu de chose, étant le fait d'hommes, superficiellement corrompus, dont toujours les actions ont un 'contenu positif' " (128). The *contenu positif* of these men is challenged in *Le Balcon*; that it is done in a sexual setting eroticizes the rebellion.

In this revolution, dominant society is emulated, and then ridiculed, by the role-playing of the brothel's clients. Bullaro points out that "[h]eavy role-playing, so visible in Genet's work, was considered by many gays to be a residue of the need to win acceptance from heterosexuals by mimicking their dichotomous concept of gender" (76), but she misses that heterosexuality is in fact mocked, rather than mimicked. Indeed, heterosexuality is but one of the patriarchal institutions mocked by Genet's role-playing, joining Catholicism, French nationalism, the bourgeoisie and, in the initial scene, the law.

3.6.1 Crime and Punishment

The sacrilege of the text's first scene renders its affront to the patriarchal forces of Catholicism, represented by religious law, legal edict, and national influence, apparent in the play. In the initial *didascalie*, Genet calls for a scene that replicates a priest's private dressing quarter:

> Le décor semble représenter une sacristie, formée de trois paravents de satin, rouge sang…
>
> Au-dessus un énorme crucifix espagnol, dessiné en trompe l'œil…L'évêque, mitré et en chape dorée, est assis dans le fauteuil. (19)

The man dressed as L'Évêque is no religious leader, but a client of Le Grand Balcon who pays a great deal of money for the brothel's staff to create an elaborate and accurate role-playing experience. Within the intricate setting, the priest's arousal depends upon the prostitute's commission of sins.

Heteronormativity is not present here; his is not the desire of a male for a female, but rather that of a priest desperate to believe that the prostitute in fact executes the sins that arouse him. Haggling over the price, L'Évêque contends that he barely got his money's worth:

> L'ÉVÊQUE, *sa voix soudain se clarifie, se précise, comme s'il s'éveillait. Il montre un peu d'irritation*: On ne s'est pas fatigué. À peine six péchés, et loin d'être mes préférés.
>
> LA FEMME: Six, mais capitaux! Et j'ai eu du mal à les trouver.
>
> L'ÉVÊQUE, *inquiet*: Comment, ils étaient faux?
>
> LA FEMME: Tous vrais! Je parle du mal que j'ai eu pour les commettre. Si vous saviez ce qu'il faut traverser, surmonter, pour arriver à la désobéissance.

L'ÉVÊQUE: Je m'en doute, mon petit. L'ordre du monde est si anodin que tout y est permis—ou presque tout. Mais si tes péchés étaient faux, tu peux le dire à présent.

IRMA: Ah non! J'entends déjà vos réclamations que vous reviendrez. Non. Ils étaient vrais. (19)

The abjection of the act resides in the criminality of La Femme. Readers are never certain whether or not intercourse has taken place between the two actors of this scene, reinforcing its anti-reproductive, and thus allegorically anti-social, atmosphere. Sex without intercourse implies that the parties desire non-physical sex, breaking the laws of normative sex. What remains clear is L'Évêque's (a figure of both the legal and Catholic patriarchies that Genet was figuratively dismantling) desire to be in the presence of a woman who commits capital sins at his behest. Genet describes La Femme as young and scantily clad, but it is not her body that drives the bishop to desire her; her sins, her very betrayal of Catholic dogma in the face of a church authority motorizes his lust. He reveals his desperation to believe that she has executed these capital sins by asking La Femme to be honest with him, forcing her madam, Irma, to confirm that great lengths were involved in the achievement of the six transgressions.

The admission of sins carries with it the act of forgiveness, a particularly potent abjective dynamic within the role-playing. As in the confessional, L'Évêque hears the sins of the faithful that he might pardon them on behalf of God. The voyeuristic aspect of confession permits the priest to fantasize about the crimes committed against Catholicism; La Femme is the criminal, L'Évêque the judge, the earthly representative of Christ, who pardons her transgressions:

L'ÉVÊQUE, *à la Femme*: Les péchés, tu les as bien commis?

LA FEMME: Oui.

L'ÉVÊQUE: Tu as bien fait les gestes? Tous les gestes?

LA FEMME: Oui.

L'ÉVÊQUE: Quant tu t'approchais de moi tendant ton visage, c'est bien les reflets du feu qui l'illuminaient?

LA FEMME: Oui.

L'ÉVÊQUE: Et quand ma main baguée se posait sur ton front en te pardonnant…

LA FEMME: Oui.

L'ÉVÊQUE: Et que mon regard plongeait dans tes beaux yeux?

IRMA: Dans ses beaux yeux, monseigneur, le repentir, au moins est-il passé? (23)

In *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, *gestes* referred to masturbation, and to movements specific to queer behaviors. Genet once again utilizes the term *gestes*, here used to describe the prostitute's sins. L'Évêque's desperation to know more about the prostitute's *gestes* illustrates his desire for proximity for abject and criminal behaviors, thus enhancing the sexual experience of forgiving her transgressions. Pardoning her confessions titillates him, especially believing that he spies a desire to *repentir* for these sins in her eyes.

L'Évêque finds the abjective desire of the prostitute to please her client, her willingness to sin on his behalf, the source of great arousal:

L'ÉVÊQUE, *se levant*: Au galop. Mais, est-ce que j'y cherchais le repentir? J'y vis le désir gourmand de la faute. En l'inondant, le mal tout à coup l'a baptisée. Ses grands yeux s'ouvrirent sur l'abîme…une pâleur de mort avivait—oui madame Irma—avivait son visage. Mais notre sainteté n'est faite que de pouvoir vous pardonner vos péchés. Furent-ils joués? (23)

But though the criminality of La Femme's *désir gourmand de la faute* piques his arousal, the client's appetite changes as Irma and the prostitute force him to change from his costume into his street clothes. The prostitute teases him by suggesting she was dishonest about committing cardinal sins:

> LA FEMME, *soudain coquette*: Et si mes péchés étaient vrais?
>
> L'ÉVÊQUE, *d'un ton différent, moins théâtral*: Tu es folle! J'espère que tu n'as pas réellement fait tout cela. (24)

Suddenly aware of his involvement in the crimes of prostitution and blasphemy against the Catholic Church, The Bishop fears that his desire for her sins, and the criminality of the sins themselves, render him also a sinner and a criminal, as if desire for abjective sexual practices is a contagion to which he cannot avoid submitting. As forgiveness occurs in the process of make-believe, he is afraid that real figures of religious or legal authority would not be sympathetic toward his crimes:

> LA FEMME: La réalité vous fait peur, n'est-ce pas?
>
> L'ÉVÊQUE: S'ils étaient vrais, tes péchés seraient tes crimes, et je serais dans un drole de pétrin.
>
> LA FEMME: Vous iriez à la police? (25)

The client cannot respond. The sounds of the revolution in the streets interrupt him and remind us that sins are seditious, an interruption to normative behaviors and criminal behavior with rebellious intent. The *didascalie* explains, "*On entend encore le même cri terrible*" (25).

Reading the play, this comment is merely a footnote; but watching *Le Balcon* means the audience will hear these cries of terror. They cannot see the fighting that occurs just off-stage, but they can see the sexual transgressions taking place right in front of them. The off-stage

revolution becomes more real by association, thus enhancing the revolutionary quality of the transgressive sex acts stimulated on stage. A suggestion of action just at the unseen boundaries of the stage carves the possibility of a space between the real and the imagined, and then positions the audience squarely within this space. Such a space, teetering between revolutionary acts and sexual rebellion, is subversive in its ambiguity and is already inscribed as abject just by its possibility.

From within their liminal space, while the audience hears real (but imagined) sounds of warfare coming from off-stage, they see nothing in the sex acts presented to them that signals either their enactment or their sincerity. No textual evidence exists as to whether the prostitute and her client had sex; that is to say, the sadomasochism of the act requires no penetration and there would not necessarily be any obvious physical signs of arousal between the actors. The intercourse itself is bound in the exchange of sin for forgiveness, of crime for pardon. As Richard Fantina has pointed out in *Straight Writ Queer*, transgression and social upheaval thrive amidst such exchanges of heterosexuality that do not fall within the parameters of heteronormativity: "an interrogation of some straight sexual practices demonstrates that many of these can be as subversive to patriarchal values and institutions of same-sex practices" (14). In this example, the straight sexual practice of anti-reproductive, anti-social, non-normative sex challenges paradigms of standard sexual practice. By denying the opportunity for conception, the authority of the Catholic Church is rebuffed. Likewise, non-intercourse defies even the tenets of homonormative sex, whose practices, such as those of heteronormative sex, traditionally rely on a pre-determined definition of intercourse. All circulating standards of sexual practice, between parties of all sexes, are damaged by L'Évêque's desire for non-physical, anti-social sex with this prostitute.

Straight queer theory repeats in the remaining elaborate scenes of role-play, each of them featuring a client whose sexual fulfillment relies upon creating scenarios of abject criminal behavior rather than upon a pursuit of a specific object of desire. In scene two, scene directions describe a second prostitute, this time portraying a thief, chained to a wall in a revealing costume: "Une femme, jeune et belle, semble enchaînée, poignets liés. Sa robe, de mousseline, et lacérée. Les seins sont visibles" (30). Despite her displayed body, the focus of desire concentrates once again on sexualized abject and criminal act of thievery she claims to have performed for her client, a man dressed as a judge.

Threads of sadomasochism lace the scene, Le Juge initially portraying a victim and quickly changing roles to express control over the woman. The scene directions call for: "*Un juge qui […] à plat ventre, rampe en direction de la femme qui recule à mesure*" (30). La Voleuse cries out to him:

> LA VOLEUSE, *tendant son pied*: Pas encore! Lèche! Lèche d'abord!…
>
> *Le juge fait un effort pour ramper encore, puis il se relève et, lentement, péniblement, apparemment heureux, il va s'asseoir sur un escabeau.*
>
> *La Voleuse (cette dame décrite plus haut) change d'attitude et, de dominatrice, devient humble*. (30)

The exchange in power originates in Le Juge's hopeful accusations regarding La Voleuse's behavior. Once again, we see a male client aroused by performing the role of a patriarchal force faced with regulating the transgressions of a woman:

> LE JUGE, *sevère*: Car tu es une voleuse. On t'a surprise…Qui? La police…Tu oublies qu'un réseau subtil et solide, mes flics d'acier, emprisonne vos gestes? Insectes aux regards mobiles, montés sur pivots, ils vous guettent. Toutes! Et

toutes, captives, ils vous apportent au Palais…Qu'as-tu à répondre? On t'a surprise… (31)

Like L'Évêque, Le Juge's titillation arises from a sexual attraction to La Voleuse's criminality. He derives great pleasure pretending that La Voleuse and others like her are brought to justice for their crimes *au Palais*, a reference to the Palais de Justice in Paris, and the suggestion that his authority extends to an army of officers at his command. The Palais de Justice implies not only the power to arrest, but also insinuates a power to imprison and eventually execute La Voleuse, as the structure contains the former prison of the Conciergerie, final home of Marie Antoinette. Le Juge claims to wield and distribute justice itself.

Le Grand Balcon provides a third employee to enhance the authenticity of the role-playing, and in this scene, Arthur serves as Le Bourreau. Feigning a body search of La Voleuse, he claims to locate a scarf under her skirt. Le Juge's arousal augments at the notion that La Voleuse might also be capable of violence:

LE JUGE, *sursautant*: Une écharpe? Ah, ah, nous y voici. Et pour quoi faire, l'écharpe? Hein, pour quoi faire? Étrangler qui? Réponds. Étrangler qui?…Tu es une voleuse ou une étrangleuse? (*Très doux, imporant.*) Dis-moi, mon petit, je t'en supplie, dis-moi que tu es une voleuse.

LA VOLEUSE: Oui, monsieur le Juge! (31)

The pleading nature of Le Juge's tone reinforces arousal at the prospect of La Voleuse's criminality. But like L'Évêque, Le Juge appears to be trepidatious at the possibility that the scenario might go too far. His desire, at first piqued by the thought that she might be a murderer, ultimately revolves around a lust for thievery.

The exchange rapidly evolves into a sadomasochistic encounter between authority and criminal. Le Juge requires more than legal domination over La Voleuse and the scenario turns toward physical punishment. Le Bourreau, directing the scene, corrects La Voleuse for confessing too abruptly:

> LE BOURREAU: Non!
>
> LA VOLEUSE, *le regardant, étonnée*: Non?
>
> LE BOURREAU: C'est pour plus tard.
>
> LA VOLEUSE: Hein?
>
> LE BOURREAU: Je dis: l'aveu doit venir en son heure. Nie.
>
> LA VOLEUSE: Pour avoir encore des coups!
>
> LE JUGE, *mielleux*: Justement, mon petit: pour avoir des coups. Tu dois nier d'abord, pour avouer et pour repentir. De tes beaux yeux je veux voir jaillir l'eau tiède. Oh! Je veux que tu en sois trempée. Pouvoir des larmes!…Où est mon Code!
>
> *Il cherche sous sa jupe et ramène un livre*.
>
> LA VOLEUSE: J'ai déjà pleuré…
>
> LE JUGE, *il semble lire*: Sous les coups. Je veux des larmes de repentir. Quand je t'aurai vue mouillée comme un pré, je serais comblé. (32)

Le Juge meets the criminality of La Voleuse with corporal punishment, enjoying not only wielding authority over the prostitute, but over Le Bourreau, as well.

Le Juge's patriarchal authority permits him to punish La Voleuse with Le Bourreau's abuse. The sexuality of the scene relies upon his satisfaction that his dominance is complete:

LE JUGE, *il continue à lire*: Bien. Jusqu'à présent tout se passait bien. Mon bourreau cognait dur…car lui aussi fait son travail. Nous sommes liés: toi, lui, moi. Par exemple, s'il ne cognait pas, comment pourrais-je l'arrêter de cogner? Donc, il faut frapper pour que j'intervienne et prouve mon autorité. Et tu dois nier afin qu'il te frappe. (33)

He senses that the three parties share a connection related to this sadomasochistic framework, and his own role is, above all, to exert his dominance over the duo. La Voleuse's attempt to confess prematurely to her theft signifies resistance to his authority, symbolic of the resistance of the abjective queerness in the scene.

Additional symbolic resistance interrupts the scenario as gunshots and fighting from the battle outside distract Le Juge. The struggle in the streets provokes an anxiety within him and he desperately presses La Voleuse for confirmation of her crimes, his pleas reminding readers of the desperation with which the prisoner Jean yearns for fantasies that can sustain his frantic masturbation:

LE JUGE: Mais au moins, tu ne me mens pas, ces vols, tu les as bien commis?

LE BOURREAU: Vous pouvez être tranquille. Il n'aurait pas fallue qu'elle s'avise de ne pas le faire. Je la traînerai plutôt.

LE JUGE: Je suis presque heureux. Continue. Qu'as-tu volé?

Soudain un crépitement de mitrailleuse.

Ça n'en finira jamais. Pas un moment de repos.

LA VOLEUSE: Je vous l'ai dit: la révolte a gagné tous les quartiers Nord…

LE BOURREAU: Ta gueule!

LE JUGE, *irrité*: Vas-tu me répondre, oui ou non? Qu'as-tu volé encore? Où? Quand? Comment? Pourquoi? Pour qui?–Réponds. (36)

The exchange has come to mirror intercourse. The greater the details of La Voleuse's story, the closer Le Juge comes to satisfaction. His claim that he is *presque heureux* should be read to indicate that he approaches climax, but the fighting outside distracts him and prevents fulfillment:

LA VOLEUSE: Très souvent je suis entrée dans les maisons pendant l'absence des bonnes, en passant par l'escalier de service…alors, je suis entrée…

LE JUGE: Où? Où? Où? Où–où–où? Où es-tu entrée?

Les où *enfilés à la fin donner:* Hou! Hou! Hou! *comme pour effrayer*.

LA VOLEUSE: Je ne sais plus, pardonnez-moi.

LE BOURREAU: Je cogne?

LE JUGE: Pas encore. (*À la Fille*.) Où es-tu entrée? Dis-moi où? Où? Où? Où? Hou! Hou! Hou!… (36)

The reiterated interrogative pronoun of *où* loses its function as a word and assumes the role of a grunt or a moan, simulating sexual intercourse. Le Juge knows just enough about La Voleuse's criminality to be aroused, but not enough to be sated. Most importantly, his desperation revolves around a need to know how she entered the houses she burglarized. Her criminal infractions, the presence of *le mal* within her, increasingly excites him because he, as judge, is the legal essence of *le bien*. Bataille traces this phenomenon back to Sade, writing that:

Sade a bien vu que l'irrégularité était la base de l'excitation sexuelle. La loi (la règle) est bonne, elle est le Bien lui-même (le Bien, le moyen par lequel l'être assure sa durée), mais une valeur, le Mal, découle de la possibilité d'enfreindre la

règle. L'infranction effraie—comme la mort; elle attire néanmoins. (*La Littérature et le mal* 137)

Her infractions titillate Le Juge, and he wants to restore her morality as much as he wants to punish her for her evil. He uses the abuses of Le Bourreau to accomplish both goals.

Le Bourreau seeks to satisfy himself, as well, and Le Juge manipulates the employee's pleasure by deriving his own fulfillment from Le Bourreau's gusto:

> LE BOURREAU: Je cogne? Monsieur le Juge, je cogne?
>
> LE JUGE, *au Bourreau et s'approchant de lui*: Ah! Ah! ton désir dépend de moi. Tu aimes cogner, hein? Je t'approuve, Bourreau! Magistral tas de viande, quartier de bidoche qu'une décision de moi fait bouger! (37)

Aroused that this powerful and muscular man beats La Voleuse at his request, the authority of his dominance excites Le Juge.

Sadomasochism waxes and wanes yet again as Le Juge remembers the temporal constraints of this role-playing. No longer intent on watching Le Bourreau beat the prostitute, Le Juge offers her masochistic submission in exchange for her confession to theft:

> LE JUGE: Comprends-moi bien: que tu te dissimules aussi longtemps que tu le peux et que mes nerfs le supportent, derrière le refus d'avouer, que malicieusement tu me fasses languir, trépigner si tu veux, piaffer, baver, suer, hennir d'impatience, ramper… car tu veux que je rampe?
>
> LE BOURREAU, *au Juge*: Rampez!
>
> LE JUGE: Je suis fier!
>
> LE BOURREAU, *menaçant*: Rampez!

Le Juge, qui était à genoux, se cache à plat ventre et rampe doucement en direction de la Voleuse. À mesure qu'il avancera en rampant, la Voleuse reculera.

Bien. Continuez.

LE JUGE, *à la Voleuse*: Que tu me fasses ramper après mon être de juge, coquine, tu as bien raison, mais si tu me le refusais définitivement, garce, ce serait criminel… (38)

Criminality assumes an additional layer during this exchange. Le Juge surrenders his authority in return for an attempt to ignobly beg for its return to him. In this sadomasochistic game, La Voleuse violates the rules of the scenario by withholding it for longer than the game permits. Her abject criminal sexuality is now threefold. Not only does she violate legal statute by working as a prostitute, but the criminal defiance of heteronormativity results in first sadomasochism, and then in an insubordination of the regulations of the game itself. Each of these acts resists the standards intended to constrain them. Prostitution and sadomasochistic sex defy the Catholic conceptions (against which Genet was reacting) of intercourse by placing their focus on pleasure rather than procreation, but the masochistic motivation to feel frustration and humiliation during sex positions makes the encounter abjective. Desire here is not born of sex objects, but of the feelings of denigration produced by La Voleuse's refusal. That Le Juge calls this refusal *criminel* reminds us that this sex act is anti-social—the mere participation of La Voleuse in sadomasochism separates the sex act from normativity.

The scene ends with Le Juge's lament that his fantasy concludes. Like the narrator of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, he describes the alternate, marginalized environment of prison as one in which the standardized tropes of good and evil are reimagined:

LE JUGE: J'allais emplir les Enfers de damnés, emplir les prisons. Prisons! Prisons! Prisons, cachots, lieux bénis où le mal est impossible, puisqu'ils sont le carrefour de toute la malédiction du monde. On ne peut pas commettre le mal dans le mal. Or ce n'est pas condamner que je désire surtout, c'est juger. (40)

Though imprisonment does not characterize the whorehouse in the way that it does the prison, the two domains share the distinction of being spaces that social regulations cannot penetrate. In this case, the figures that Le Juge dominates reverse the power structures in play. He desires most of all to judge and administer punishment, but the games of La Voleuse and Le Bourreau prevent it.

The final lines of the scene form the clearest illustration of Le Juge's abject desire for humiliation at the hands of a criminal:

LE JUGE, *à la Fille*: Madame! Madame, acceptez, je vous en prie. Je suis prêt à lécher avec ma langue vos souliers, mais dites-moi que vous êtes une voleuse…

LA VOLEUSE, *dans un cri*: Pas encore! Lèche! Lèche! Lèche d'abord ! (40)

Right through its conclusion, this scene redefines the stakes for social and sexual orientations.

3.6.2 The Hero and His Horse

The abject and sexual desires of Le Juge and L'Évêque each conquer, within their respective scenes, various tropes of patriarchal oppression, in relation to the rule of law and the rule of Catholicism respectively, while both disrupt conceptions of hegemonic heteronormativity. Scene Three continues these arguments, introducing an erotic focus that reiterates that abjective sexuality need not be associated with a sex or with a gender, nor need it be neither human nor alive. Like the scenes before it, Genet uses role-playing to imagine anti-social, abjective non-

intercourse as a means of literally challenging dominant stereotypes of sexuality while allegorically challenging politics; bodies revolt with sex in the bedroom, with rebellion in the streets. These challenges become more pronounced, however, as Genet introduces both animality and death into the role-playing, insisting quite pointedly that the abject and anti-social sexuality of the scene does not necessarily relate either to living eings nor to humans.

Le Général is the first of the clients to make mention of experiencing the revolution taking place on the streets:

> LE GÉNÉRAL: J'ai couru des risques très graves. La population a fait sauter des barrages, et des quartiers entiers sont inondés. L'arsenal en particulier, de sorte que toutes les poudres sont mouillées. Et les armes rouillées. J'ai dû faire des détours assez grands—sans avoir toutefois buté contre un noyé. (42)

The detour he employs to arrive at Le Grand Balcon symbolizes the circumlocution of heteronormative impositions, paralleling the activities that take place within the salons of the brothel.

Le Général wears street clothes until the arrival of companion, once again dressed to emphasize her physique, which he barely notices. The props she carries with her draw his sexual attentions, rather than her exposed femaleness:

> *[P]ar la porte du fond entre une jeune femme très belle, rousse, les cheveux dénoués, épars. Sa gorge est presque nue. Elle n'a qu'un corset noir, des bas noirs et des souliers à talons très hauts. Elle tient un uniforme complet de général, plus l'épée, le bicorne et les bottes.* (44)

The seduction of her entry lies in the potential for role-play, in the costume of a general that will permit Le Général to assume his authority.

Le Général's dominance is complicated. Differently than L'Évêque, an authority of the Catholic faithful, and Le Juge, an autority of the state, a general commands only those who have chosen to dedicate their lives to military service. He does so, however, on behalf of the nation, the overarching patriarchal framework that encases the domain of Le Juge and L'Évêque. Though he cannot wield his control as liberally as the latter two, his power permits him to defy the enemies of France. Death during battle furnishes him with greater power than that of a general who survives conflict. He seeks for his own criminality, his crimes of violence on the battlefield, to be honored and esteemed.

The prostitute's servile role enhances the criminality of her employment by rendering her an accomplice to violent murder. Acting as Le Général's horse, she accompanies him as he wounds and kills on the battlefield. The criminality that she embodies is his own, and the sight of the blood of his victims on her costume excites him. Evidence of this hostility composes part of her costume:

> LE GÉNÉRAL, *regardant les bottes*: Et le sang? Je ne vois pas le sang?
>
> IRMA: Il a séché. N'oubliez pas que c'est le sang de vos batailles d'autrefois. (44)

Imagining the prostitute as his mare completely disassembles heteronormativity. Though she retains her femaleness, he requires her animality so that she completely submits to his authority.

The power dynamic here of humanity/animality requires much of the girl. He expects her to assume the role of mare by falling to her knees and whinnying whilst performing the very human task of dressing him for burial:

LE GÉNÉRAL: On ne t'avait pas donné ton sac d'avoine? Tu souris? Tu souris àton cavalier? Tu reconnais sa main, douce et ferme? (*Il la flatte*.) Mon fier coursier! Ma belle jument, avec toi nous en avons gagné des galops!

LA FILLE: Et ce n'est pas fini! Mes sabots bien ferrés, de mes pattes nerveuses, je veux arpenter le monde. Retirez votre pantalon et vos souliers, que je vous habille.

LE GÉNÉRAL, *il a pris la badine*: Oui, mais d'abord, genoux! À genoux! Allons, allons, plies tes jarrets, plie…

La fille se cabre, fait entendre un hennissement de plaisir et s'agenouille comme un cheval de cirque, devant le Général.

Bravo! Bravo, Colombe! Tu n'as rien oublié. Et maintenant, tu vas m'aider et répondre à mes questions. C'est tout à fait dans l'ordre qu'une bonne pouliche aide son maître à se déboutonner, à se déganter, et qu'elle lui réponde du tac au tac. Donc, commence par dénouer mes lacets. (44)

Le Général exerts control of La Fille in dual realms, both the human and the animal. She becomes his warhorse while simultaneously acting as his mortician. His power even extends to the afterlife, he the dead man that speaks orders to a living woman. That he calls her *colombe*, the Christian symbol of peace, bears special significance. As his fantasy includes war and murder at the hands of a nation once heavily influenced by the politics of Catholicism, Genet uses the dove to criticize these patriarchies.

La Fille's crimes generate from her willful refusal to obey the authority of a commanding officer. She, the woman and the mare, defies his orders, suddenly gaining awareness of the servility of her actions:

LA FILLE: Qu'est-ce que je fais? Déboutonnez-vous.

LE GÉNÉRAL: Es-tu cheval ou illettrée? Si tu es cheval, tu encenses. Aide-moi. Tire. Tire moins fort, voyons, tu n'es pas cheval de labour.

LA FILLE: Je fais ce que je dois.

LE GÉNÉRAL: Tu te révoltes? Déjà? Attends que je sois prêt. Quand je te passerai le mors dans la gueule…

LA FILLE: Oh non, pas ça.

LE GÉNÉRAL: Un général, se faire appeler à l'ordre par son cheval! Tu auras le mors, la bride, le harnais, la sous-ventrière, et botté, casqué, je cravache et je fonce!

LA FILLE: Le mors, c'est terrible. Ça fait saigner les gencives et la commissure des lèvres. Je vais baver du sang.

LE GÉNÉRAL: Écumer rose et péter du feu! (46)

The imagery of La Fille's blood represents her punishment from the bridle for opposing his orders. Le Général's excitement originates from his criminality, and he requires her obedience as his steed in order to commit murder on the battlefield.

Rather than carrying Le Général in the traditional manner of a military horse, he relies on La Fille to recount to him his heroic moments in battle prior to his death. Her obedience is embedded in the tale she tells him. As the imaginary battle begins, sexuality colors his experience with his mare:

LA FILLE: La guerre est déclarée. Il fait bon…

LE GÉNÉRAL: Mais soudain?

> LA FILLE: Nous sommes au bord du pré. Je me retiens de ruer, de hennir. Ta cuisse est tiède et tu presses mon flanc. La mort… (47)

Though Le Général does not mount La Fille in the scene, that he wishes to do so during battle, the very context of his criminality, bears importance; sexuality and criminality mingle on the imagined battlefield. He requires believing that his mare enjoys being ridden, and her whinnying, a mark of pleasure seen earlier in the scene when she initiates her portrayal of a horse, indicates pleasure at being mounted prior to battle.

Le Général's own violence generates the sexuality of the fantasy, titillating him as he listens to La Fille describe the mayhem of the battlefield and the injuries to his victims. Exhausted from monitoring Le Général's tally of casualties, Death claims him among her dead:

> LA FILLE: Enfin, la mort était active. Agile, elle allait de l'un à l'autre, creusant une plaie, éteignant un œil, arrachant un bras, ouvrant une artère, plombant un visage, coupant net un cri, un chant, la mort n'en pouvait plus. Enfin, épuisée, elle-même morte de fatigue, elle s'assoupit, légère sur tes épaules. Elle s'y est endormie. (48)

The mare acts as a surrogate criminal in Le Général's fantasy. While La Voleuse and La Femme portray criminals in order to excite their clients, La Fille must manifest the criminal deeds of the client himself. The authoritative power that he pursues, rather than religious or legal, is that of the national hero. Dead, his authority cannot be questioned or reappropriated by another power.

Now deceased, the climax of Le Général's fantasy role-play involves La Fille actually pulling, on her hands and knees, his ornamented, reclined body through the streets:

LA FILLE, *solennelle et triste*: Le défilé est commencé…Nous traversons la ville…Nous longeons le fleuve. Je suis triste…Le ciel est bas. Le peuple pleure un si beau héros mort à la guerre.

LE GÉNÉRAL, *sursautant*: Colombe!

LA FILLE, *se détournant, en pleurs*: Mon général?

LE GÉNÉRAL: Ajoute que je suis mort debout!

Puis il reprend sa pose.

LA FILLE: Mon héros est mort debout! Le défilé continue. Tes officiers d'ordonnance me précèdent…Puis me voici, moi, Colombe, ton cheval de bataille…La musique militaire joue une marche funèbre… (50)

In death, Le Général must not only be accompanied by his mare, but he must also hold her responsible for explaining to him the reactions to his death processional. Her own tears, in addition to the *peuple qui pleure*, reward him for his murders. His reaction to make it known that he dies *debout* in this fantasy symbolizes his own erection, death becoming the source of, and the erection representing the result of, his criminal conduct. Death while *debout* symbolizes his sexual satisfaction in the face of his own criminality.

While Le Général murders and injures on the battlefield, death provides him reprieve from his inhumanity. In this role-play, she, the mare, lives on to endure the punishment of his crimes by laboring his dead body through the streets. It appears, in this instance, that patriarchy and heteronormativity win with Le Général's death, and that this fantasy features no rebellion to topple these institutions. Yet, the final commentary of this scene belongs to the revolution in the streets: "*Au loin, crépitement de mitrailleuse*" (51). The audience, whether reading or watching, is consistently reminded of the presence and the power of social upheaval. Le

Général's death, though seemingly a loss that indicates that this upheaval has failed, connects directly to the sexuality of the scene. Rather than failing, then, Le Général, in dying, simply fulfills the contract initiated by sex. As with Divine and Notre-Dame, sex both begets and kills its participants. Le Général's abjective anti-intercourse leads to his death, imagining that he might re-create the scene again and again.

3.6.3 Fleas and Filth

The fourth scene, the last to showcase a client of the brothel seeking sexual fulfillment from criminal behavior, bears a resemblance to its predecessor in that his own transgressive acts are those that appeal to him. Uninterested in the power and prestige coveted by his colleagues, the fourth client dresses as a homeless man. Despite his costume, viewers cannot help but notice that vagrancy, for this man, is but an act. They see "*un petit Vieux vêtu en clochard, mais bien peigné, immobile au milieu de la pièce*" (52). Positioning him in the center of the stage reinforces that his scene will address him and him alone. The prostitute is neither a participant nor a prop, though she is, indeed, present. Her revealing dress reinforces the client's disregard of her beauty. "*Près de lui, indifférente, une très belle fille rousse. Corselet de cuir, bottes de cuir. Cuisses nues, et belles. Elle attend. Le petit Vieux aussi. Il est impatient, nerveux. La Fille immobile*" (52). Their mutual indifference reveals that Le Vieux has come for a feeling, not for a female.

The pair continues to ignore each other until Irma arrives and hands La Fille a whip and a filthy wig. The presence of these items, a weapon and an infested garment, visibly excites Le Vieux:

> *Le visage du petit Vieux s'illumine.*

La Fille rousse a un air exagérément altier et cruel. Elle lui colle la perruque sur la tête, brutalement.

Le petit Vieux sort de sa poche un petit bouquet de fleurs artificielles. Il le tient comme s'il allait l'offrir à la Fille qui le cravache et le lui arrache d'un coup de martinet.

Le visage du petit Visage est illuminé de douceur.

Tout près, un crépitement de mitrailleuse. (52)

The violence and abject filth thrill Le Vieux, for the criminality that stimulates him is the simulated marginalization of homelessness taking place within the fantasy. Though illegal, the criminality of vagrancy itself does not titillate. Rather, as in the case of Divine's criminal gender expression and the incarceration of Jean and his lovers, homelessness involves occupying an unregulated margin of society that escapes the standardizing powers of the panopticon. The transgressions of living beyond the borders of social control excite Le Vieux, cleanliness and hygiene among the socially cauterized characteristics that he is thrilled to disregard:

Le petit Vieux touche sa perruque:

LE VIEUX: Et les poux?

LA FILLE, *très vache*: Y en a. (52)

Fleas infect the wig, but risking infecting his own scalp delights the clearly well-groomed and non-homeless client. The ever-present rounds of machine gun fire sounding in the distance comment on the sexual revolution of the scene. Le Vieux's desire for abject filth, poverty and social stigma have motivated his patronage of Le Grand Balcon, not the possibility of sex with the institution's beautiful women.

3.6.4 The Abject Heroine

As the role-playing occurs, the revolution waged beyond the doors of the brothel takes its toll on patriarchal institutions. This battle remains a metaphor for sexual revolution as both sides fight over the use of Chantal, a prostitute at Le Grand Balcon, as their Jeanne d'Arc. Her lover Roger, a Royalist, argues with three rebels outside the brothel:

> L'HOMME*, à Roger*: Alors, c'est oui ou c'est non?
>
> ROGER: Et si elle y reste?
>
> L'HOMME: Je te la demande pour deux heures.
>
> ROGER: Chantal appartient…
>
> CHANTAL: À personne!
>
> ROGER: …À ma section!
>
> L'HOMME: …À l'insurrection!
>
> ROGER: Si vous voulez une entraîneuse d'hommes, fabriquez-en. (54)

The rebels win the argument and Chantal leads their cause of insurgency. Her criminal sexuality, subversive to the patriarchy as it offers men sexual reprieve away from their lawful and religious marital unions, represents victory for this side of the battle. Differently than the heroism imagined by Le Général, who wants to be adored by the nation, Chantal occupies the ranks of the shunned and the marginalized, marking her as the abject heroine.

Chantal thus allegorizes the French patron saint Joan of Arc, Genet using her role in the text much as he used Divine: a working prostitute in place of the virginal saint chosen to represent France. Joan of Arc was an instrument of dominant national and religious forces over which she had no control, just as the rebels select Chantal as their heroine through no choice of her own. The Catholic maiden represents not only France as a nation state, but also the country's

deeply Catholic history, for not only did she fight to free France from British control, she claimed to have done so at the behest of God and Catholic saints Michael, Catherine and Margaret. Chantal thus becomes the anti-patron saint, or the queer patron saint, fighting not for the protection of established, dominant social forces but for the anti-social currents that seek to subvert them.

3.6.5 A Reversal, and a Refusal, of Roles

Acknowledgement of Chantal's prostitution appears as the final textual reference to abject forms of sexuality, but queerness remains Genet's focus for the remainder of the text, which focuses on protecting Le Grand Balcon's heritage as the site of abjective sex and non-normative sexual practices. The whorehouse, the very site of abject criminal seduction and sexuality, becomes the locus of immediate civilization, a palace, a cathedral, and a courthouse all in one. This site becomes the metonym for straight queerness, assuming the representation of both abjection and anti-sociality. The final struggle of the play involves liberating the whorehouse from such institutionalization, and restoring it to its original status of abjective, queer, and outside the boundaries of normative behaviors. A refusal, at the hands of Irma and her clients, to re-appropriate power and to usurp social prestige presents the queerest textual maneuver yet.

The social institutions that monitor behavior—the Church, the law, the nation—violently lose their figureheads—a bishop, a judge, a general, and even the queen—during the rebellion. A royal envoy enters Le Grand Balcon asking Irma, her patrons and staff to replace the dead figures and to conduct royal business as usual, the subjects of the crown none the wiser. The newly found authority initially seduces the unlikely team:

L'ÉVÊQUE: (*Avec autorité*.) Pour moi, chef symbolique de l'Église de ce pays, j'en veux devenir le chef effectif. Au lieu de bénir, bénir et bénir jusqu'à plus soif, je vais signer des décrets et nommer de curés. Le clergé s'organise. Une basilique est en chantier. Tout est là. (*Il montre un dossier qu'il tenait sous le bras*.) Bourré de plans, de projets. (*Au Juge*.) Et vous?

LE JUGE, *regardant sa montre-bracelet*: J'ai rendez-vous avec plusieurs magistrats. Nous préparons des textes, une révision du Code. (*Au Général*.) Vous?

LE GÉNÉRAL: Oh, moi, vos idées traversent ma pauvre tête comme la fumée traverse une cabane en planches. L'Art de la Guerre ne se réussit pas de chic. (118)

Genet permits each of the clients, except for Le Vieux, to assume the roles they so eagerly performed during their sessions with prostitutes. Irma, now La Reine, rules with an iron fist:

LA REINE: J'avais ordonné moins de condamnations à mort et davantage aux travaux force. (124)

These authority figures, this time wielding real power because of this bizarre twist of revolutionary fate, change nothing about the roles they have assumed. The status quo remains intact, the figures are stuck within its parameters and once again, it appears as if the revolution has lost.

Bersani, in discussing Genet's *Les Bonnes*, comments that the morphology of "maidness" shared by maids Claire and Solange, corners them in this category much as Irma and her clients are pinned down by the institutional rules of their new roles. Bersani views maidness as the

cement that binds the murderesses to their mistress. Their status as maids is the permanent and static context of their criminality and of their rebellion. He asks:

> [H]ow do you get rid of an essence (or as a *pis aller*, change essences)? […] Genet answers this question through an intricate play with relationships. The essence is indeed like a frozen block of being, but it has only a relational existence. Maidness is the relation between Madame and the two maids, as well as between the maids. What and how a maid "is" is entirely spelled out within the cultural construction of those relations […] The maids' dilemma is that there is nothing they might do to Madame that would not confirm their identity as maids. Even to kill her […] would transgress their maid-subjectivity in a way determined by that scenario. Transgressiveness is part of their identity. (173)

Bersani provides a relevant framework through which to view the cast's assumption of the actual roles of queen, general, bishop and judge. Like the maids, the cultural construction of the queer role-playing has already defined them. Their mimicry of authority is their "maidness," and to sacrifice the actual enactment of authority robs them of their transgression just as Claire and Solange's loss of "maidness" robs them of theirs.

As quickly as the team realizes that they perpetuate an oppressive system, these figures also realize that they have no intention of revolutionizing the frameworks of power that exist at their disposal. To do so would position queerness as an authority, diluting its rebellious characterizations and re-coloring it as standard practice. The final and most decidedly queer act of this play emerges when La Reine and her team perceive the corruption that accompanies a patriarchy, even a patriarchy staffed by queer figures; the realization for each of them arrives at different moments. Stifled by their own falsely assumed normativity, L'Évêque and Le Juge

renounce their roles and speak the loudest against the systematic standardizations of their function, arguing with La Reine in rejection of the opportunity to overthrow the new national Hero, the former chief of police:

> L'ÉVÊQUE, *arrogant*: Pour être francs, madame, nous n'y songeons déjà plus. Moi, mon jupon m'embarasse et je me prends les pattes dans la guipure. Il va falloir agir.
>
> LA REINE, *indignée*: Agir? Vous? Vous voulez dire que vous allez nous déposséder de notre pouvoir?
>
> LE JUGE: Il faut bien que nous remplissions nos fonctions?
>
> LA REINE: Fonctions! Vous songez à l'abattre, à le diminuer, prendre sa place! Fonctions! Fonctions!
>
> L'ÉVÊQUE: Dans le temps—dans le temps ou dans un lieu!–il existe peut–être de hauts dignitaires chargés de l'absolue dignité, et revêtus d'ornements véritables…
>
> LA REINE, *très en colère*: Véritables! Et ceux-là, alors? Ceux qui vous enveloppent et vous bandent—toute mon orthopédie!—et qui sortent de mes placards, ils ne sont pas véritables. (125)

L'Évêque laments the oppression of his priestly garments, his explanation that he "[s]e prend les pattes dans la guipure" symbolic of his impotence and lack of influence despite his authority. When confronted with La Reine's concern that they will overthrow the Hero, he passes the responsibility along to an *absolue dignité*, indicating that he does not believe in the power vested in them by God and by the law. He surrenders their power back to the monarchy. La Reine's claim that the garments that "vous enveloppent et vous bandent" should be read to indicate her

surprise that the former clients do not wish for their abject sexual desires to become social dominance. The clothes and roles not only envelope them, they sexually stimulate the men and cause them to *bander*.

L'Évêque's resistance is at the heart of queerness, which can never become a patriarchal or dominant force. As a Catholic bishop, he is not only an authority of morality and social conduct, he also monitors the morality and social conduct of those below him, namely priests, monks, and nuns, in the hierarchy of Catholic ascendancy. He acknowledges that the abject sexual desires expressed in the salons of the brothel escape his (and any) regulation, claiming that they can never be regulated or sanitized lest they be diminished and thus diluted of their queerness:

> L'ÉVÊQUE, *s'échauffant*: Tant que nous étions dans une chambre de bordel, nous appartenions à notre propre fantaisie: de l'avoir exposée, de l'avoir nommée, de l'avoir publiée, nous voici liés avec les hommes, liés à vous, et contraints de continuer cette aventure selons les lois de la visibilité […] Alors nous rentrons dans nos chambres y poursuivre la recherche d'une dignité absolue. Nous y étions bien et c'est vous qui êtes venu nous en tirer. Car c'était un bon état. Une situation de tout repos: dans la paix, dans la douceur, derrière des volets, derrière des rideaux molletonnés, protégés par des femmes attentives, protégés par une police qui protège les boxons, nous pouvions être juge, général, évêque, jusqu'à la perfection et jusqu'à la jouissance! (129)

He complains of the *visibilité* of making abject sexuality a pervasive social force. To view it is to understand it, and the queerness of abject sexual motivations resists normative comprehension and perception by the panopticon.

Earlier in this debate, L'Évêque predicts that an *absolue dignité* will come along and strip the normative and authoritative Hero of his power. Here, he insists that he and his fellow patrons seek a *dignité absolue* in their abjective and sexual encounters. In the former case, *dignité* should be read in relation to rank; another, more normative and cauterized force will challenge the Hero and the patriarchy. In the latter, *dignité* relates to the truth present in pursuing abjective sexual desires beyond the gaze of the panopticon; though their desires may escape social regulation, but escaping does not mean that they are stifled.

The following and final client convinces La Reine that she and her companions are far too subversive to usurp these normative roles of standardization. Roger, Chantal's Royalist lover, patronizes Le Grand Balcon as its first client since the rebellion has concluded, but he brings with him decidedly pedestrian desires. Once the site of subversive sexuality, where men could punish criminality and revolution with feigned authority and dominance, the brothel now attracts the patriarchy it once resisted; Roger wishes to play the Hero. And his scene will not be role-play, intending instead to be immortalized in national memory as a national institution by dying as the Hero:

> ROGER, *hésitant*: Et…le mausolée?
>
> CARMEN (a prostitute), *avec force*: Taillé dans le roc…Un travail gigantesque a forcé le massif. Les hommes continuent à gémir pour vous creuser une niche de granit. Tout prouve que vous êtes aimé et vainqueur.
>
> ROGER: À gemir? Est-ce que…est-ce que je pourrai entendre des gémissements?

Elle se tourne vers un trous percé au pied de la muraille et d'où sort la tête du Mendiant, celui qu'on a vu au huitième tableau. Il est maintenant l'Esclave.

CARMEN: Approche!

L'Esclave entre en rampant.

CARMEN: Il est beau, n'est-ce pas? Il est maigre, il a des poux et des plaies. Il rêve de mourir pour vous. (143)

Roger's desires do not originate from abjective lust to witness and punish criminality. He requires only to be recognized as authority, and to die in a mausoleum constructed for him by the workers of a nation that adore him for that authority. Rather than a prostitute, a slave supplements the scenario, reflecting the abuse of absolute power that Roger wishes to simulate.

Witnessing Roger's scene, absent of sex and criminality, La Reine recognizes that the brothel has been broken by the regulatory processes bestowed upon it by her and her companion's newly found powers. No longer microcosms of spaces that host small-scale social and sexual rebellions, the nation protects Le Grand Balcon from such intrusive behaviors:

CARMEN, *à Roger*: Partez! Vous non plus vous n'avez pas le droit de me poser des questions. Vous le savez qu'un règlement très strict régit les bordels, et que la police nous protège. (148)

Police forces now safeguard Le Grand Balcon from the normative practices it fears, but this reappropriation of power strips the space of its queer sexuality, positioning queerness as the dominant authority enforcing such a *règlement très strict*.

Upon realizing that the whorehouse is a site for sexual make-believe and not political emulation, that this domain creates and sustains spaces for subversiveness and not hegemonic standardizations, Roger cuts off his penis:

> ROGER, *se dégageant*: Si le bordel existe, et si j'ai le droit d'y venir, j'ai le droit d'y conduire le personnage que j'ai choisi, jusqu'à la pointe de son destin…non, du mien…de confondre son destin avec le mien…
>
> CARMEN: Ne criez pas, monsieur, tous les salons sont occupés. Venez…
>
> ROGER: Rien! Il ne me reste plus rien! Mais au Héros il ne restera pas grand-c hose…
>
> *Roger a sorti un couteau, et,le dos au public, fait le geste de se châtrer.*
>
> LA REINE: Sur mes tapis! Sur la moquette neuve! C'est un dement. (149)

He removes the phallus, symbol of the patriarchy, La Reine's strong reaction suggesting that she cannot bear any trace of the phallus, even of its demise, staining her brothel. This phallic significance empowers the text's attempts at anti-social upheaval and predicts their success. The dominant, regulating powers of the text—religion, law, and the nation—are impotent.

Awakened by the dangerous proximity of normativity, La Reine's final activity involves an introspective cleansing the space of these imposters and returning it to its usual, intended, transgressive shape, possible now because the phallus has been removed:

> LA REINE: Messieurs, vous êtes libres… (152)

She liberates her comrades of their oppressive new roles and frees them to return to their previous ones, men whose queer heterosexuality is fulfilled only by abjection. And later, shutting off lights, as if to shield the brothel from the panopticon, she permits herself a return to her previous state, as well:

> LA REINE, *sans s'interrompre d'éteindre*: …Irma, appelez-moi madame Irma, et rentrez chez vous. (152)

Genet attributes the last lines of the play to Irma, whose final monologue, performed while shutting off lights and protecting the whorehouse's transgressive contents from view, seems to be an acknowledgement of queer sexualities at large:

> IRMA: Tout à l'heure, il va falloir recommencer…tout rallumer…s'habiller… (*On entend le chant d'un coq*.) s'habiller…ah, les déguisements! Redistribuer les rôles…endosser le mien… (*Elle s'arrête au milieu de la scène, face au public*.) …préparer le vôtre…juges, généraux, évêques, chambellans, révoltés qui laissez la révolte se figer, je vais préparer mes costumes et mes salons pour demain…il faut renter chez vous, où tout, n'en doutez pas, sera encore plus faux qu'ici… (153)

Irma's address of the audience directs her words to them, speaking to them directly that they are the "révoltés qui laisse(nt) la révolte se figer." Instructing them to *rentrer chez vous* tells them of her awareness of the queer acts that take place in households and in homes, not only and not necessarily within brothels, drawing attention to the fact that normative spaces can be queer spaces, too. Her words remind readers and observers of the subtle but persistent presence of queerness, almost promising us that if we look for it where we are, there we shall find it.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Far from being only and exclusively tied to the body as object choice, the sexual feelings that Genet ascribes to his characters revolve around a pursuit of abstract (for readers)

manifestations of the abject, sexually and criminally, intent on disrupting the currents of social normativity. In *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon*, systems of morality are simply recast as often as they are challenged, meaning that Genet resists a social hegemony that he would just as soon, and does at times, ignore. The body is removed from desire's line of sight and repositioned as the site of abjective desire, rather than its target. In this way, anti-social behavior, sexual and otherwise, evolves into the abject object choice.

But as David Halperin has shown us, anti-social sex can be retracted from overturning dominant cultural forces and directed inward, toward the motivation to simultaneously pleasure and endanger the self.[30] Though death and even murder consistently instigate desire in Genet's figures, true violence, violence that threatens both the desired and the desirous, is not thoroughly investigated by Genet. Furthermore, female desire goes unexamined, as the desire of Divine, a transfigure, is never situated far from her homosexuality, and the politics of *Le Balcon* exclude the potential for female erotics. A representation of abstract, criminal abject sexuality is missing from Genet's corpus.

Judith Halberstam explains that all queerness examined only in relation to masculinity shares such incompletion: "The politics of masculinity […] names a politic strand that can easily incorporate forms of female and male masculinism while casting all female identification as a source of inferiority and as contrary to the nation state" ("The Anti-Social Turn" 147). And Genet, whose figures collide with the masculinity characteristic of the patriarchies he challenges, is not immune to this critique. Abject, criminal queerness, then, must be interrogated from another angle. In the chapter that follows, I provide discussion of three recent French films—*La Cérémonie*, *Baise-Moi* and *Haute Tension*—in which I interrogate the presence of abjective

[30] Halperin's argument from his canonical *What Do Gay Men Want?* becomes most relevant in the following chapter, where I point out its framework for criminal, lesbian violence.

criminality within female erotics not as an anti-social resistance, but rather as an anti-self resistance that manifests desire, abjection, and self-loathing.

4.0 FEAR AND (SELF-)LOATHING IN FRENCH CINEMA: THE CASE OF THE CRIME SPREE

The previous chapter demonstrated the relationship between anti-social, criminal behavior and the abject sexuality that, when provoked by such behavior, rebels against social and sexual norms. Drawn to each other for both covert and for overt expressions of criminality, the characters of Genet's *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Le Balcon* execute small-scale revolution in their refusal to conform to hegemonic social and sexual standards. In these works, expressions of gender and sexuality are never normative and always represent fissures in the system of practiced gender roles and actions.

In this chapter, I build upon my discussion of criminality and abject by locating these themes in erotically charged female friendships that occur within three recent French films. My work joins that of Lucille Cairns, who intervenes in the already quietly prolific study of lesbian desire in anglophone cinema through her analysis of lesbian desire, representation and viewership within francophone films in *Sapphism on Screen*.[31] Differently from Cairns' project, the films studied in this chapter—Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995), Virginie Depentes' and Coralie Trinh Thi's *Baise-moi* (2000), and Alexandre Aja's *Haute Tension* (2003)—considers female same-sex attraction, rather than the identificatory status of the lesbian, in relationship to the abject in the women's acts, behaviors, and attitudes.

As in Genet's texts, these films feature abject sexual desire that is motorized by criminality. In these movies, however, criminality is extended beyond mere anti-social behavior

[31] On lesbian desire in anglophone cinema, see Kabir, Weiss, Whatling, White and Wilton.

and petty crime, expanding to showcase the vivid brutality that nourishes a sexual dynamic within an erotically charged female friendship. In *La Cérémonie* and *Baise-moi*, two female friends forge a sexual attraction to each other that develops in relationship to murder; while in *Haute Tension*, the unrequited desires of Marie for her friend Alex result in disturbing scenes of murder as Marie attempts to express her love for her friend.

In my discussion, I concentrate on the intense abject self-loathing that incites these women to commit violence, an element that introduces an additional layer of anti-social sentiment to the abjection of their desires and that constitutes a self-consciousness and an insecurity that are conspicuously absent from Genet's brazen, though noticeably less aggressive, characters, but that form abjection nevertheless. This self-loathing transforms into a journey of agency and self-knowledge, as the afflicted characters rely on sexualized abjection as a means of overcoming shame and gaining self-esteem. In fact, one party systematically relies on the other in order to soothe this self-shame, ultimately triggering the ensuing sexual connection. Tanya Krzywinska even identifies abjection as an instrument of self-defense and preservation: "Abjection's primary function is to enable the subject to maintain the boundaries of ego-identity. Abjection can then be seen to operate as a defence mechanism as it helps to define what is regarded as 'human' in a given cultural moment" (196).

Therefore, differently from the figures discussed in the previous chapter, these couples do not act on their same-sex attractions and do not engage in intercourse with their criminal partners, and their desire thus does not assume the same anti-social status of rebellion enjoyed by Divine, Mignon, Irma, L'Évêque and Le Juge. Instead, in this chapter, I prove that certain female criminals featured in *La Cérémonie*, *Baise-moi*, and *Haute Tension* engage in violence to soothe a private shame, and that their violence evolves from this shame into a tool by which they

form an intimate personal connection with another woman that permits them a greater self-understanding. Using David Halperin's theoretical model of perilous sex from *What Do Gay Men Want?*, I show that this violence represents the danger of loss or even death. Their connection is bound to ultimately self-destruct and is thus automatically geared toward a major personal loss—but both the power of their abjective sexual connection and their haste to alleviate the weight of their personal disgrace prevent these women from avoiding danger.

4.1 WHY FILM? WHY THESE FILMS?

Differently from the erotic criminality of Genet's pieces, in which crimes and sex must be intellectualized by the reader, the very framework of the horror or the thriller film exists to shock, to scare, and even to disgust quickly and intently. But to do so, an audience must feel happiness and excitement at the prospect of being shocked, scared, or disgusted. Abjection then, with its heady combinations of pleasure and pain, arises within no more apt of an environment than the cinema. As Martine Beugnet has observed,

> [i]n contemporary French film, the cinematographic exploration of a sensory, embodied comprehension of reality can take the form of a celebration of the sensual, reflexive bond of subjective body to objective world. It may also lead to the evocation, through graphic violence or sex, of a violently disjointed relationship between subject and object that quickly brings the cinematic experience into the realm of the abject […] Indeed, a cinema of the senses always hovers at the edge of pleasure and abjection—between the appeal of a sensuous

> perception and exploration of the reality portrayed, and the close encounter with the abject. (32)

If the audience feels good when it feels bad, it feels especially good for them, then, to see the performers on the screen likewise vacillating between disgust and desire, or repulsion and magnetism. The relationship cultivated between the subject and the object pinpointed by Beugnet, specifically when the object is one of abject desire, suggests that abjection is at its most acute when sex or sexuality is also involved. These intersections of violence, abjection and sex can been seen and understood without the risk of mistaking or misinterpreting them. Tim Palmer extends Beugnet's assertions, and joins her in openly claiming that French avant-garde cinema has much to tell about the coupling of sex and violence:

> The filmmaking agenda here is an increasingly explicit dissection of the body and its sexual behaviors: unmotivated or predatory sex, sexual conflicts, male and female rape, disaffected and emotionless sex, ambiguously consensual sexual encounters, arbitrary sex stripped of conventional or even nominal gestures of romance. Forcible and transgressive, this is a cinema of brutal intimacy. (22)

If we take Palmer's list to be comprehensive of the characteristics that qualify such brutal intimacy, *La Cérémonie*, *Baise-moi* and *Haute Tension* each offer a complex landscape of sex and violence in this vein.

If the horror film offers a rich texture by which to study abject desire, the form of the woman only enhances that study. Barbara Creed's canonical approaches to women and violence in the horror film greatly inform this chapter, though my views differ in critical ways. I agree wholeheartedly with Creed's assessment that "[t]he reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his

audience. As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality" (3). The danger of the women I study lies in their tremendous capacity for violence, a theme that exists co-mingled with her sexuality. It is, then, precisely her abject sexuality that titillates and terrifies. I depart from Creed's larger analyses, however, especially in terms of the Kristevan abject, where she identifies the monstrous-feminine as relative to "mothering and reproductive functions…the archaic mother; the monstrous womb; the witch; the vampire; and the possessed woman" (3). In fact, the abject fluids that I identify earlier in this chapter are largely anti-reproductive; even Manu's menstrual fluid appears to be an Amazonian affirmation of her imperviousness to pregnancy rather than a gesture toward her reproductive properties.

My claims are much more in line with the second half of Creed's book, in which she relates abjection and horror within the female figure to sexuality and desire. Here, she concentrates most of her interrogation of the monstrous-feminine and sexuality in relationship to Freudian castration.[32] Most specifically, my argument aligns with Creed's as she identifies a queer non-woman in the slasher films that feature a dominant female villain. She penetrates, but she is not phallic and she is not male: "The avenging woman of the slasher film is *not* the Freudian phallic woman whose image has been repressed in Freudian psychoanalytic theory

[32] Specifically, Creed devotes much of her cinematic close readings to the presence of metaphorical vaginas dentatas and their symbolic castration:

> The theme of the dangerous entrance or passageway is also common to the horror film: the corridor may fill with waves of blood that threaten to engulf everything (*The Shining*); or the bedroom may transform into a large sucking hole (*Poltergeist*); or the airducts of a spacecraft may be controlled by an alien with gaping jaws and snapping teeth (*Alien*). The killer frequently hides with knife poised in a darkened doorway or at the top of a staircase. Tunnels and caves are filled with spiders, snakes or bats which attack the unwary. (108)

The vagina becomes a weapon. Though I do not disagree, my reading includes no detailed analyses of the vagina or of vaginal acts in response to Creed's affirmations.

largely because it challenges Freud's view that man fears woman because she is castrated" (127). The acts of penetration or of allegorized penetration—perpetrated throughout the three films with guns, knives, blunt instruments, and even an electric saw—symbolize not impotency or castration, but an anti-voyeuristic manifestation of queer sex that refuses to be seen.

In fact, that *La Cérémonie*, *Baise-moi*, and *Haute Tension* so neatly package the combination of abjection, violence and sex *via* the image of the woman also highlights the relevance of film in this dissertation project. Laura Mulvey's canonical frameworks about the figure of the woman and scopophilia point to the fundamental plot advancement initiated by the female on screen:

> In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire […] The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. (19)

I am not going to deny the power of male desire within the scopophilic gaze, but any mesmerizing sexuality on the part of the female protagonists in *La Cérémonie*, *Baise-moi*, and *Haute Tension* occurs without the consent of heteronormative enforcement of "legitimate" or normative sex. In other words, there will be no scopophilic indulgence at viewing two women making love to each other—their sexuality involves no sex. Though Mulvey speaks in general

terms, the moments of erotic contemplation throughout these three films are moments of queer contemplation that blur the lovemaking of the female couples and instead allegorize it as something else entirely. In *La Cérémonie*, this appears first as Sophie's and Jeanne's tickling, then later as their murder of Sophie's employers; for Manu and Nadine in *Baise-moi*, their shared eruptions of violence represent intercourse; for Marie in *Haute Tension*, sex surfaces in her violent assault on her best friend, murder therefore replacing the intercourse the pair will never share.

4.2 LESBIANS, ABJECTION AND RISK

La Cérémonie, *Baise-moi*, and *Haute Tension* reinforce the surrounding chapters of my project by presenting another model of abjection in sexual attraction and sexual relationships, and I must therefore be clear that this chapter is not, in fact, about "lesbians" or "lesbianism" as the terms are used in popular discourse. My project is not concerned with the issues of identity politics that arise from same-sex attraction, nor is it my intention to examine the clearly queer gender identities expressed by the women in these three films. Though the usage of "lesbian" persists, even within queer theory, as one of the field's most enigmatic designations, I am more interested in understanding the agent of abjection in the sexual desires that evolve between women in these movies and its relationship to their shared violence. For the purposes of this discussion, I employ the word simply as a means of describing the erotic tension and unfulfilled sexual potential that plays out between the three couples, rather than as a means of engaging in the identity politics that surround sexual orientation. Likewise, my analysis does not examine at length the imagery and representation of the woman, of the lesbian or of lesbian desire on screen,

though the observations of key scholars in queer/lesbian and film scholarship will serve to theoretically inform my conclusions.[33]

I do, however, focus on the queer sexuality that develops between the women I study in these three films. Though nothing in the films indicates an investment in lesbian politics or identifications, the currents of sexuality that course between first Jeanne and Sophie, and then Manu and Nadine, are generated by a mutual attraction to cruelty, danger and anti-sociality. The desire is thus anti-normative in origin, and evolves as anti-normative in its manifestation. The women never use intercourse to consummate their desire; they rely instead on violence in order to express the intensity of their attraction to the abject. Desire between two women embodies queerness, then, because it resists the label of "lesbian" and never surfaces as immediately intelligible or traditional intercourse.

Further, the figure of the woman, as opposed to that of the man, is not used unintentionally. As Valerie Traub has claimed, I also find the figure of the lesbian can be a "privileged site of inquiry," though not, for me, as Traub also claims, because the lesbian "embodies the potential desiring modality of all viewing subjects, her body displacing the binary economy enforced by heterosexual ideology" (311). While I agree that the physical form does indeed disrupt binaries of heteronormativity, I do not similarly conclude that her desire represents all the potential forms of desire represented in viewership. Instead, the privilege of the lesbian lies in that she taps into a specific vein of male and/or heteronormative scopophilic gaze: the desire to observe affection and intimacy between two women. The women of *La Cérémonie*, *Haute Tension*, and *Baise-moi* each display a certain degree of shared intimacy but stop short of indulging this gaze with intercourse, using violence and murder to allegorize the

[33] Laura Mulvey's *Visual and Other Pleasures* and Teresa de Lauretis' *The Practice of Love* are canonical approaches to the presence of the woman and the lesbian in cinema and television.

overt lesbian sexuality they resist in showcasing on screen. And though, as Cairns elucidates, "the same film will not 'be' lesbian for all spectators," and though this chapter is not dedicated to dissecting the motives and investments of viewership, I nevertheless claim that this cinematic defiance serves as a recognition and a resistance of hegemonic and patriarchal frameworks to which viewers may or may not subscribe (7). Cairns calls for room in the viewership of French and francophone cinema for "the possibility of female-specific and lesbo-specific scopophilia," but my project does not have stakes in viewership studies (8). Though various kinds of sexed, gendered, and sexualized gazes compose what we understand to be "viewers," I do not examine them in detail. I use the films in this chapter as instruments by which, as in all other chapters, normative and dominant concepts of gender and sex are challenged, confronted and dismantled.

And the abjection that draws the female protagonists toward each other also comes to symbolize the intercourse they resist exhibiting. The abjective qualities of our protagonists reiterate the Kristevan model of abjective criminality as seen in Chapter Two, though in this chapter, they seemingly exceed even Julia Kristeva's expectations of anti-sociality, criminality and violence. She identifies abjection within

> [t]he traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior…Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such ragility. He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law–rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body

> for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you… (*Powers of Horror* 4)

While Divine, Mignon, Notre-Dame, Irma, and her clients can be described using the model above, their sexuality always surpasses their criminal acts in explicitness and graphic description. The depraved cruelty of the women of *La Cérémonie*, *Baise-moi*, and *Haute Tension* do not share this obscurity, and bring Kristeva's assertions to life. Rather than having to imagine what the women's crimes might look like, viewers are confronted with images of graphic violence and sex. We do not have to envision their correlation in this setting—abjection, violence and sex are presented to viewers as utterly indivisible.

Though Julia Kristeva's description of abjection remains the central theoretical framework by which I analyze its textual or cinematic presence, her deeply Freudian analysis of lesbian desire marks a critical difference between her approach to reading female same-sex attraction and mine. In *Tales of Love*, she pinpoints the maternal body as an abject figure, cut off from the paternal/patriarchal Phallus and steeped in rejection, but she envisions love between two women as the anti-abject, a more pure and perfect form of affection:

If, on the other hand, there were a female libido, could one imagine an erotics of the purely feminine?

> [A]ndrogynous paradise and, in another way, lesbian love comprise the delightful arena of a neutralized, filtered libido, devoid of the erotic cutting edge of masculine sexuality. Light touches, caresses, barely distinct images fading one into the other…It evokes the loving dialogue of the pregnant mother with the fruit, barely distinct from her, that she shelters in her womb…Relaxation of

> consciousness, daydream, language that is neither dialectical nor rhetorical, but peace or eclipse: nirvana, intoxication, and silence.
>
> When such a paradise is not a sidelight of phallic eroticism, its parenthesis and its rest, when it aspires to set itself up as absolute of a mutual relationship, the nonrelationship that it is bursts into view. (*Tales of Love* 81)

Though Kristeva likens the ecstasy of this non-phallic androgyny to that of a mother cradling, even nursing, her infant—"the light rumble of soft skins that are iridescent not from desire…that slumbers or wakens within the embrace of the baby and its nourishing mother" (81)—the maternal body does not infect the encounter with abjection.[34] My discussion in this chapter, therefore, seeks to use Kristevan models of abjection in order to dismantle her later models of lesbian desire, as the abjective sentiments shared between the women of *La Cérémonie*, *Baise-moi*, and *Haute Tension* do not share an attraction borne of missed or misplaced maternal identification. These female characters are not drawn to the femaleness of their partner's body; these bodies are simply the site of the excitement provoked by abjection, danger, and sex. Their "nonrelationships" burst into view through vicious acts of violence, rather than through a loving or nurturing connection, and their libidos undergo filtering only through a magnetized sexual attraction to this violence, revealing the accidental queerness of their connection.[35] In each film,

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[34] Kristeva's approach to analyzing homoeroticism remains the subject of some complicated debate, especially regarding its relationship to the woman and to lesbianism. For her claims in *Black Sun*, published four years after *Tales of Love*, she has been accused of homophobia. Writing of a woman's self-identification with the maternal figure, who must become the subject of matricide, she laments: "The homosexual shares the same depressive economy: he is a delightful melancholy person when he does not indulge in sadistic passion with another man" (29).

[35] De Lauretis perceives a dismal failure to truly grasp lesbian desire on the part of Kristeva. Criticizing *Tales of Love*, she observes: "[T]he homophobic, heterosexist subtext remains. Creeping about more or less discreetly in this essay, the suggestion that lesbianism may be the feminist form of female paranoia is raised to the status of a death sentence" (178).

one women's cruelty is rewarded with the loss of her friend and the object of her affection—even resulting in death in the cases of *La Cérémonie* and *Baise-moi*. Yet none of these female protagonists considers the risk of loss latent in their aggression, the intoxication of abject sex and violence too powerful to deny.

In order to position such this relationship of sexual risk, private shame, and queerness in these three films within a broader landscape of queer scholarship of desire, I turn to David Halperin, who also identifies queerness when desire cannot exist without danger, therefore proposing a model that informs my reading of risk, violence, and sex. In *What Do Gay Men Want?*, he raises the topic of the simultaneous seduction and stigma of barebacking—unprotected intercourse and the possibility of the transmission and infection of HIV—as initially broached by Michael Warner's 1995 article for the *Village Voice*, "Unsafe: Why Gay Men are Having Risky Sex." Halperin's claims must be understood in relation to Warner's, who relates having engaged in unprotected sex with a man whom he suspected to be HIV positive. The desire of the moment gave way to moments of sheer panic and regret, but his desire eventually returns and he seeks intercourse with the man again many weeks later, this time also without a condom:

> When I talked to my friends about the episode, I mentioned only how explosive the sex had been; not that it was unsafe. I recoiled so much from what I had done that it seemed to be not my choice at all. A mystery, I thought. A monster did it.
>
> The next time I saw the same man, we went back to his apartment again. I thought to myself to take precautions, but I could tell by the heady thrill that my monster was in charge. Even scarier than the risk itself was the realization that shame and fear had not been enough to keep me safe. Suddenly I had to think

> about why I wanted risky sex, knowing that danger was part of the attraction. In the vast industry of AIDS education and prevention, I knew of nothing that could help me answer this question. (Halperin 157)

Warner's abject sexual desire in this case may be difficult for him to name, but he nevertheless assigns it a shape: the monster. Though the intercourse he describes is consensual, readers understand that it is never non-violent; he succumbs to the monster's appetite for risky sex even though, and perhaps because, he is afraid.

The sense that this pleasure could ultimately test his mortality enhances Warner's enjoyment of this sexual intercourse, and thus his inability to adequately articulate these desires, and to name this "monster," intensifies this abjection. The well-meaning network of AIDS education inspires Warner and others, he says, "to pretend that our only desire is to be proper and good. Abjection continues to be our dirty secret" (163). Halperin dedicates his essay, though significantly longer than Warner's article, in response to him, contending, in fact, that abjective sex is not a secret after all:

> Warner's monster […] served as a figure for the antisocial impulse to queer revolt that may lead some gay men to have risky sex—the delirious pleasure some gay men may take in contravening both society's norms and their own ('the rejection of normal life'). (63)

Risk fulfills a critical component of queer sexuality, one that defies normative calls to abide by rules of standardized health and safety practices, and it resides not just with Warner's monster, but in the sex lives of many gay men. He is deeply critical of the normative assumption that "no sane person would ever put his life at risk to obtain sexual pleasure" (11) and emphasizes that when it comes to barebacking, "[by] putting yourself at risk, you interrupt the normal course of

your life, resist its established order of meaning, and thereby perform an immanent critique of its priorities. Risk is a tactic for testing which of your values ultimately count" (47). As is true in the case of Genet's *Le Balcon* and *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, queerness lies in this realm of sexual risk-taking, challenging prescribed edicts of sex and relationships by asserting that these institutions need not be physically or psychologically safe in order to also be desirable.

It is of note that Warner and Halperin write primarily about the relationship of abjection to risk, using sex between men as an experiential context. The focus of their respective arguments, however, does not rely on male homosexual contact in order to thrive and thus can be located elsewhere. According to this model set forth by Halperin, then, the women of *La Cérémonie*, *Baise-moi*, and *Haute Tension* put their lives at risk in pursuit of a similar sexual danger—sex that they may not achieve, but can never try to experience without a relationship to violence. Because their attraction to each other never culminates in intercourse, the women do not risk contracting a life-threatening sexually transmitted infection.[36] The abject force of violence in their relationships, the factor that in fact motorizes their mutual desire, endangers their lives nonetheless. As shame prevents at least one partner from consummating her desire with sex, violence becomes intercourse that scathes as much as it satisfies.

This brutality erupts as their own irresistible and abjective "monster" who must be satisfied. Tony Magistrale explains the figure of the monster as a cinematic element of the horror/thriller genre that need not be in the form of a physical adversary:

> The various definitions of monstrosity […] from the supernatural to the psychotic—share at least some association with Kristeva's inclusive definition of the abject. The monsters either embody the abject in themselves—the otherness

[36] At least, not from intercourse with each other; in *Baise-moi*, the women's sexual partners are numerous and they do not always use protection.

> of their bodies and actions—or project it onto others […] Abject terrors, then […] are the core disruptions of to the social order and paternal norm set in motion by the monster and invoke the response of terror, confusion, disgust or perverse association with other characters in the screen as well as in the audience watching the film. (xvi)

The monsters we see in these films, then, surface as the desire that the protagonists feel toward each other manifests as murder. They cannot refuse their mutual attraction and they cannot alter the course of cruelty that ensues because of their intimacy. In fact, though traditional intercourse does not characterize the relationships between these women, and the sex act of barebacking is the central theme of Halperin's and Warner's arguments, the sexually charged depravity shared by these women similarly predicts that they risk losing if not just their partner, but perhaps also their lives, as they appeal to the needs of their monster.

In each of the cinematic close readings that follow, I will first establish the presence of deep-seated self-shame in one of the female protagonists. Then, I will trace their increasing erotic investment in their relationship as violence emerges as a sexually charged dynamic.

4.3 SECRETS AND SELF-LOATHING: *LA CÉRÉMONIE*

In Claude Chabrol's 1995 thriller *La Cérémonie*, the wealthy Lelièvre family hires meek and insecure Sophie as a live-in maid. The analysis that follows first introduces Sophie's self-shame and traces its inevitable dependent relationship with Jeanne. I prove that the pair is drawn to each other not only in terms of a dominant figure (Jeanne) desiring a submissive figure

(Sophie), but also because they understand each other's violence and use it to allegorically represent an intercourse they deny the desirous voyeuristic gaze latent in scopophilia.[37]

Sophie's sexually infused friendship with family foe Jeanne Marchal, whose reasons for a loathsome obsession with the Lelièvres are never made clear, results in the eventual murder of the entire family. My reading of the film begins with identifying the signs within its early that hint at Sophie's and Jeanne's queerness, as well as toward Sophie's troubled past, and then moves to demonstrating Sophie's tremendous shame at being uneducated to the point of being completely illiterate. Her illiteracy seriously compromises her sense of self, something she regains only through her relationship with Jeanne, who is not only literate, but a voracious reader. Finally, I prove that her abjective friendship with Jeanne, who comes to represent a sort of heroine to Sophie, becomes at first sexual once their mutual history with violence becomes apparent, and ultimately fatal as they consummate their relationship through violence, challenging traditional conceptions of sex by replacing intercourse with murder.

After hiring Sophie, Catherine returns home to her family—husband Georges, who is her second spouse, her son Gilles, and Georges' daughter Melinda. Their familial unit, though blended, represents the normative landscape against which Sophie's and Jeanne's queerness stands out quite boldly. Catherine shares news of the new maid:

> CATHERINE: Je crois qu'elle n'est pas mal…Je parlais de la nouvelle bonne.
>
> MELINDA: "La bonne," c'est humiliant.
>
> GEORGES: Sérieusement, ma chérie, "bonne," c'est un terme assez gratifiant! Bonne…bonne à tout faire! Bonne à tout faire! Qui peut se vanter?

[37] Sandrine Bonnaire portrays Sophie; Isabelle Huppert portrays Jeanne.

This scene, discussing the absent Sophie, establishes Sophie's exclusion from the family unit and points toward her queerness. She does not belong. Their jokes about her status situate her beyond the family and outside of the normative structures of family and sexuality. Jean-Claude Polack and Annette Michelson also recognize the challenge posed by Sophie's queerness to such a familial hegemony:

> Words and family, sense and infantile sexuality form redundant system whose least crack might one day explain the explosion. The economy of signification is inseparable from the familial structure of masters and domestics, the parental intrusion of the former, the progressive oedipal perversion of the latter. (84)

Alone and lonely, Sophie occupies a space below and outside of the unit of a wealthy and closely knit family.

Most importantly, the dialogue also signals the evil in Sophie that will go unnoticed until the last moment. Her malice goes undetected because her new employers cannot imagine that a "bonne," also the French term for the adjective "good," could present a possible threat to them, not because they know enough about Sophie to believe that she is good, but because she is but the maid. Catherine's assertion "Je crois qu'elle n'est pas mal" indicate not simply that she does not think that Sophie is "bad" as a potential employee, but should also be read to indicate that Catherine has not stopped to consider that a maid could be capable of violence. Sophie's very evil, then, interrupts the normative dynamics of master and servant and of family and housekeeper.

From the moment of Sophie's initial arrival at the train station on the day she moves in, Sophie's potential to be conniving quickly becomes apparent. Catherine meets Sophie's intended train only to find that Sophie arrived on an earlier train without having informed Catherine. The

camera pans from a frustrated Catherine, searching the crowds exiting one train, to the penetrating gaze of Sophie, who awaits Catherine from the opposite *quai*. Julien Lapointe pinpoints this moment as another prediction of Sophie's violent potential:

> Sophie's second appearance bears a hint of the unexpected: as the wife Catherine comes to meet her at the train station, Sophie is already waiting on a separate platform. Her being placed (initially) outside of the frame suggests omniscience: she's free to see all, yet remain unseen. Within the formal set-up of this scene, she implicitly has the upper hand over her employer, which foreshadows the genuine reversal of power she will eventually exercise over Catherine and her family. (1)

Catherine predicts that Sophie is *bonne* and *pas mal*; the maid's surprise arrival foreshadows that Sophie will defy Catherine's predictions. That she arrives early for no apparent reason and without notice reinforces Sophie's queerness. Her peculiar actions place her physically outside the lines of normative behavior, quite literally on the other side of the train tracks, where she can observe without being noticed.

Catherine had come to the train station with a plan, and she appears immediately uncomfortable with Sophie's odd manner of disrupting it. Her discomfort only augments when, as they leave the train station, Jeanne, the local postal clerk who Catherine hardly knows, requests a ride back to work:

> JEANNE: Madame Lelièvre! Excusez-moi de vous déranger. Vous savez, je suis Jeanne Marchal, la postière à Saint Coulomb.
>
> CATHERINE: Ah, oui. Bien sûr.
>
> JEANNE: Je n'ose pas vous demander, mais si vous rentrez chez vous, vous ne pouvez pas m'amener jusqu'à la poste?

CATHERINE: Si. Bien sûr.

Like Sophie's unexpected earliness, Jeanne's favor is also an unforeseen and unnerving addition to Catherine's plan, whose bewildered eyes let on her concern that a near stranger not only calls her by name, but that Jeanne also asks her for a ride.

The following two scenes position Jeanne as an outsider and signal her queerness. Placed in the back seat of the car, she is the excluded party. Sophie, after all, is Catherine's only intended passenger; Jeanne's placement behind them reminds viewers that she intrudes on the scene, that she is the queer passenger. Yet, like Sophie, she, too, does not belong. Seated in the rear of the vehicle, she stares back and forth between Catherine and Sophie, eventually letting her stare rest on Sophie. Though she is out of the line of sight of the front seat, Sophie nevertheless senses Jeanne's gaze and turns her head to return the stare. Catherine acknowledges this awkwardness in the following scene, once they have dropped Jeanne at the post office: "Elle doit se demander qui vous êtes. Mon mari ne peut pas la blairer." This comment signals Jeanne's queer status in relation to the Lelièvres. Like Sophie, she is an outsider, and it is curious not only that Catherine believes that Jeanne, a stranger, take interest in her guest, but also that Georges allegedly hates Jeanne. Catherine offers no answers, corroborating that Jeanne's relationship to the Lelièvres is quite queer.

While these events all motion toward the future violence that is yet to come, the final moments before Sophie enters the Lelièvre mansion gesture toward her lethal past, a key component of Jeanne's attraction for the housekeeper. Lifting Sophie's suitcase from the trunk, Catherine remarks that the bag "pèse comme un homme mort." The line obviously refers to Sophie's significant metaphorical baggage and to the murderous personal history with which she arrives at her new job.

4.3.1 Illiteracy and Illegibility

Her violent past is not Sophie's only baggage, however, and she bears the guilt of murder with no shame. She is ashamed, however, of an illiteracy that will introduce her to an abject partner that soothes her shame. Her illiteracy also serves to obscure her normativity—she exists well beyond the bounds of written language—and to reinforce her queerness.

The origin of Sophie's self-loathing immediately surfaces from her first day in the Lelièvre household, and her self-consciousness quickly increases in relationship to the job that the Lelièvres have hired her to do. Though Sophie works as a housekeeper, she is instantly, and consistently, confronted with her illiteracy. In her bedroom on the day of her arrival, she crouches before her television set and frantically pushes buttons, unsure which will turn it on, her face showing relief when the screen illuminates with images. During her tour of the grounds, Catherine shows to Sophie Georges' library and his significant collection of books, explaining only "la bibliothèque." So great is Sophie's anxiety at being surrounded by the source of her abject self-loathing that she lingers in the doorway, unable to bear being near the books. The scene's only background music is an ominous violin solo, a foretelling announcement that Sophie's entry to the library endangers her not just her pride, but also the safety of the Lelièvres. Catherine, later evaluating the maid's performance at cleaning the entire home for the first time, exclaims to Georges, "Impeccable, sauf ton bureau. J'ai l'impression qu'elle n'a pas touché tes livres." Later, vacuuming the home, Sophie freezes at the door to the study, refusing to enter even to clean the floors.

Though the family does not directly pick up on Sophie's illiteracy, Georges identifies certain oddities in Sophie's behavior. He does not realize her aversion to the printed word, but senses her dishonesty and manipulation:

GEORGES: Il y a une chose qui m'intrigue: pourquoi vous ne prenez pas la machine à laver?

SOPHIE: Je n'aime pas. Je vais plus vite comme ça. Je n'aime pas les machines.

Her anxiety filters through her lie—her initial reaction that it is faster to wash by hand would have sufficed—but her claim that she does not like technology points to her fear, especially as by now viewers have observed that television both hypnotizes Sophie and soothes her panic, and she never misses an opportunity to watch it. Polack and Michelson pinpoint a neediness in Sophie that relies on television, specifically the set in her bedroom, in order to receive information about the world: "Her room, far removed from the family, contains the essential element of her autistic setup. Here the eye's role is preponderant. Sophie has only her gaze to guide her, the eye as compass in the exotic world of text. Images, faces, and landscapes are her only practical geography, and her means of survival" (84).

Georges then offers to pay for Sophie to learn to drive and offers her the use of their car:

SOPHIE: Ce n'est pas possible. Je vois trop mal.

GEORGES: Ah bon? Vous n'avez pas de lunettes.

He gazes at her with suspicion, her answers no longer making sense. And his statement "Vous n'avez pas de lunettes," though posed as a question, is in fact a declarative observation that Sophie, who insists on bad vision, does not wear glasses. Again, she responds with lies to cover the shame of her illiteracy:

SOPHIE: Je ne sais pas. Elles ne sont plus à ma vue.

GEORGES: Il faut arranger ça tout de suite.

Her embarrassment seeps through once again, "Je ne sais pas" being an inadequate response to a direct question. Her claim that her prescription has changed is an adjustment to the lie after the fact.

Terrified of being discovered, Sophie's abject shame is so deeply seated that she must follow the lie through to the end, revealing her desperation for her secret to remain illegible to the Lelièvres. She cannot read, but she also cannot bear her handicap to become readable. This frantic fear leads her to wander the streets of Saint Malo in search of non-prescription lenses while she is supposed to visit an optician. Finding sunglasses, she asks the clerk, "Vous n'avez pas de plus claires?" and ultimately purchases a pair of them with rose-colored lenses. The lenses appear throughout the film whenever Sophie needs a confident cover to her illiteracy. Covering her eyes represents an attempt to obscure not only her lie, but also the source of her abject shame.

Sophie's abject disgust at her illiteracy is most painful when Catherine leaves behind a note with instructions: "Pourriez-vous repasser mon tailleur blanc. Merci d'avance." She grabs it and runs to her room, where she extracts a phonetics book whose binder is equipped with a lock, permitting only Sophie to read its pages. Using her key to open it, she searches for the letter "P." The camera focuses on the book as Sophie feverishly turns its pages, permitting viewers to see that the highly illustrated book is for children and is intended to help them associate sound production with hand gestures. The angle of the camera lets the audience witness just what it is in the book that Sophie sees: a series of pictures of a small boy pursing his lips with a clenched fist, and then pronouncing the letter "P" as his hand opens wide, bears the caption: "Puis sa bouche et sa main s'ouvrent en même temps pour dire **p**." Sophie, shaking and sputtering, kneels on her bed and attempts to use the images to help her pronounce "P" and thus decipher

"Pourriez." Staring confusedly at her hand as it clenches and releases, she grows exasperated as she understands that the hand motions themselves cannot help her produce the sound. She lays her head her bed and cries. The pictures in the book of children remind viewers that literacy is achieved during childhood, and thus reinforce the decades that Sophie has lived with the abject shame of being illiterate. She cannot read the captions and relies solely on the pictures she cannot interpret. Literacy itself thus remains illegible for Sophie.

The audience understands the damage that this deficiency exercises on Sophie's sense of identity when they understand that she cannot even write her own name. A deliveryman asks for her signature while her employers are away:

> LE LIVREUR: Il faut me signer le papier de livraison.
>
> SOPHIE: Je ne sais pas signer le nom de mes patrons.
>
> LE LIVREUR: Mettez le vôtre. Il n'y a pas d'importance.

He places a pen in her hand, takes her hand in his and guides it to mark a scribble on the invoice. The camera points down at the document, and the audience sees that her signature cannot be more than a series of indiscriminate marks. The deliveryman's hand does not even guide her to make a proper "X," suggesting that Sophie's identity, like her sexuality, exists as illegible under the surface of her illiteracy.

4.3.2 The Literate Heroine

This illegibility among normative identities gestures toward Sophie's second queer layer: her abjective connection with Jeanne. In fact, it is when she recognizes and exalts Jeanne for her literacy that she begins to feel intelligent and knowing just by association, easing her shame and enabling her to begin fulfilling her abject and sexual interest in her new friend. Sophie's initial

attraction to the postal clerk arises in relationship to Jeanne's hyperliteracy. She exalts her new friend's relationship with and access to the written word, drawing Sophie to her and opening up their friendship to more violent and sexual possibilities.

Sophie understands that she risks losing her job and her place to stay because the very project of learning to read remains impossible, and she senses Georges' suspicion of her deceit. When her anxiety is at its peak, her friendship with Jeanne, who relishes reading, begins and thus ultimately calms her terrible self-loathing, lending her a new found sense of self-confidence. Meeting by chance at the supermarket, the postal clerk approaches Sophie as she reaches for a box of chocolates. Jeanne suggests that Sophie purchase a better brand:

SOPHIE: Ce sont au lait?

JEANNE: Regardez. C'est écrit dessus: "Sélection de chocolat au lait extra fin."

Even at this early stage in the film, the audience has by now realized that Sophie subsists almost exclusively on chocolate candy; Jeanne's assistance thus represents critical maintenance of Sophie's very existence. Further, that Jeanne works as *la postière*, in a space originally intended for the conveyance of the written word, means that she is not only Sophie's unofficial savior. Jeanne represents professional literacy.

As Jeanne persistently attempts to find ways to spend time alone with Sophie, it is this literacy that eventually exerts a seductive power over the housekeeper. When the maid exits the supermarket, Jeanne follows her, inviting Sophie to come spend time with her while she works at the post office, claiming that "Il n'y a pas beaucoup de monde ici. Ça me laisse le temps pour lire." She spends her free time at work reading, executing the very skill that remains illegible to Sophie, and Jeanne's invitation to include Sophie in this literate space should be read as a message of protection and defense.

Sophie understands this message loud and clear, and it is not long before she rushes to the post office in need of Jeanne's literacy during a moment of panic.[38] In the mean time, the postal clerk succumbs to impatience and visits Sophie at the home of the Lelièvres. Her queerness is once again signaled by strange behavior, knocking on the window and refusing to enter the home through the door:

SOPHIE: Je vais vous ouvrir la porte.

JEANNE: Ah, pensez-vous!

Jeanne's visit to the house solidifies two things: first, Jeanne's literacy is used to signify the violence that is yet to come, and secondly, it establishes Jeanne's hatred for and obsession with Georges and Catherine, though this aspect raises far more questions than it answers. Sophies hates herself, but Jeanne hates the Lelièvres.

In the home, the postal clerk reacts with excitement to Georges' enormous collection of books, introducing an important element of intertextuality in the film:

JEANNE: Ah, dis donc! Tous ces boucains! Que j'adore lire! J'ai pris un bouquin. Ça fait rien? *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. Tu crois que c'est bien?

The unabashed misanthropy of Louis-Ferdinand Céline's debut novel criticizes not only human nature, but also the superficial institutions perpetuated by humans. Jeanne's interest in this particular text therefore predicts not only the normative institutions and practices that Jeanne's and Sophie's shared queerness consistently defies, but it also identifies the cruelty latent within the women that their very nature must ultimately release. A section of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* is set colonial Africa, and as Jeanne pilfers from Georges, a Turkish television station broadcast in France transfixes Sophie, as if she speaks Turkish. These brief references to Orientalism

[38] To be discussed later in this chapter.

associate the women with The Other, situating them even further beyond the boundaries of social and cultural norms.

Jeanne insists on seeing Georges and Catherine's bedroom. There, seated on the bed, she shares with Sophie her abhorrence:

> Un jour, elle est venue à la poste. Et je l'ai bien connue. Elle aussi, elle m'a reconnue; je sais qu'elle m'observait. Peut-être qu'elle n'était pas sûre, qu'elle se demandait où elle m'avait déjà vue. Je ne comprends pas pourquoi elle est venue à la campagne. Je me suis dit que peut-être elle voulait se faire oublier après tout ce qu'elle a fait à Paris.

The camera focuses on Jeanne's face as she shares her memory, executing a slight close-up as she loses herself in remembering the details of whatever Catherine did in Paris. As she bounces back to reality, the camera pulls back and the audience now sees Sophie's face. She has been staring intently at Jeanne and a look of identification surfaces in her features; she sees her own abject self-hatred in Jeanne's abject hate for the Lelièvres.

Jeanne has won Sophie over, and a friendship blossoms. When Catherine gives Sophie a list of essential grocery items required for an upcoming party, a horrified and shameful Sophie turns to her new friend, without disclosing her secret, to help her keep her job. As Catherine explains her instructions, viewers see Sophie wearing her non-prescription rose-tinted glasses, helping her to remain calm, to improvise, and most importantly, to keep her secret. She removes them in order to stare at the list she cannot read, and her reflection in the mirror both showcases her fear and shame, reminding viewers of how intimately her identity is entangled with her inability to read. Illiteracy corrodes Sophie's self-image.

Rushing to the post office to see Jeanne, a panicked Sophie lies to her friend: "Je pensais que tu pourrais m'aider. Le téléphone est tombé en panne, et Madame Lelièvre me demande de passer une commande pour ce soir. Tu ne pourras pas les appeler?" Her brow furrows in the fear that her illiteracy is on the verge of discovery, terror giving way to relief as she watches Jeanne read the list over the phone to the grocer. For the first time, viewers see Sophie as she appears when she feels happiness, smiling very broadly as she thanks Jeanne: "Merci. Tu es gentille." She gains tremendous confidence from observing Jeanne as she reads, marching to a second store and promptly ordering the items that the grocer told Jeanne were unavailable. As she "reads" to the grocer, she applies her rose-tinted lenses, concealing her shameful secret while infusing Sophie with self-assurance. Their friendship now begins to evolve into something more complicitly violent; Jeanne has given Sophie the sense of self-worth necessary for the maid to trust her.

4.3.3 Abject Histories and the Sexualized Present

The confidence that Sophie feels soothes her self-shame, but she understands that it generates from Jeanne's friendship. The individual queerness of her illiteracy opens up the possibility of friendship between the two women, a connection that exposes the abject and violent queerness that the two share. The friendship between Jeanne and Sophie becomes sexualized by the abject violence present in each other's past, details that render each woman irresistible in her friend's eyes. They each learn about the other's history of cruelty independently, Sophie overhearing Georges complain that Jeanne may be stalking his family by opening their mail: "Regarde ce paquet. Il a été ouvert et refermé n'importe comment…Je suis persuadé qu'*elle* l'ait ouvert. Et les lettres aussi sont recollées—ça se voit! Moi, je pense d'avoir

marre de cette fille." Catherine remains doubtful, and Georges insists that Jeanne is conniving enough to commit such behaviors because she also got away with murdering her daughter years ago:

> GEORGES: Tu sais, cette fille qui a mis la gamine toute amochée à l'hôpital, et alors elle est morte…C'est vrai qu'on n'a pas pu prouver que c'était le maltraitement, mais enfin elle était poursuivie et jugée.
>
> CATHERINE: Comment tu sais tout ça?
>
> GEORGES: C'est dans les journaux! C'est bizarre que tu t'en souviens pas.
>
> CATHERINE: Rien ne prouve que c'était la même [personne].
>
> GEORGES: Ils ont publié sa photo. J'ai reconnu tout de suite.

Sophie gives no clear reaction to hearing these violent details about Jeanne, but they clearly increase her desire to spend time with her friend, as she leaves her post early the day of the party and literally runs to meet Jeanne in the forest.

Going back to Jeanne's apartment, sharing details of each other's previous murder's leads to the film's only scene of sexual excitement and intimacy. Sophie cuts to the chase:

> SOPHIE: J'en ai appris sur toi.
>
> JEANNE: Des choses bien, j'espère.
>
> SOPHIE: Il paraît que tu aies tué ta fille.
>
> JEANNE: Qui est-ce qui t'a raconté ça?
>
> SOPHIE: Je le sais.
>
> JEANNE: Comment tu le sais?
>
> SOPHIE: Je le sais.

JEANNE: Ce n'est pas vrai. Elle s'est brûlée toute seule. De toute façon, ils ne pouvaient pas le prouver. Tu veux voir des photos?

Over the course of the film, Sophie responds to direct questions with "Je ne sais pas" at least ten times. This dialogue is the first instance in the film in which Sophie can confidently say that she *knows* something, in which she can affirm that she has knowledge. Moreover, the defiance with which she reiterates to Jeanne that she knows that Jeanne is guilty suggests that her certainty stems from her ability to sense Jeanne's abjection, perhaps knowing that she would not feel attracted to Jeanne without this violence. That Sophie also makes the daughter's death an immediate subject of conversation with Jeanne should be seen as a sign of Sophie's titillation, not only at the boost of confidence in knowing something, but also at the thought of such abject brutality at the hands of her friend.

This exhilaration explains Sophie's disappointment at Jeanne's refusal to accept guilt, raising her eyebrows as she looks Jeanne in the eyes: "Ce n'était pas toi qui l'as fait?" Jeanne never insists upon her innocence—only that the crime was never proven: "Il n'y avait pas à prouver, je te dis! Le juge a dit qu'on n'avait pas de preuve." Throughout their exchange, both friends consume their lunch with gusto, not letting their discussion of murder interfere with their appetite. The loud sounds of their forks piercing the plate as they spear their mushrooms suggests they associate the pleasure of eating with the pleasure of murder.

Jeanne counters with a comment she likely heard said of her crime at the time of her trial—"Comment veux-tu qu'une mère tue son enfant? Ce n'est pas possible"—then adding, "Même s'il n'est pas normal." Jeanne perceives her crime as abnormal, not vicious or cruel, seeing herself therefore as also abnormal and outside of normativity. Her violence broke social

law, but also violated the cultural contract of safety between a mother and child, signifying her queerness.

Sophie remains seated while Jeanne stands, gaining power over her friend by intimating, "Moi, aussi, j'en sais sur toi." Digging through a stack of old newspapers, she produces an article about Sophie that features her picture. She reads the article to Sophie, who looks down at her plate, overcome not by she shame of her murder, but of her inability to read an article about herself, albeit one that accuses of her harming her father:

> JEANNE: 'L'incendie est criminel, mais le criminel est en liberté': La police a pu prouver l'origine criminelle de l'incendie qui a ravagé le 15 rue de la Providence, au cours duquel Monsieur Jacques Bonhomme a trouvé la mort, mais elle n'a jamais pu mettre la main sur le coupable. Sa fille, entièrement dévouée à ce vieillard paralysé, était sortie quelques minutes pour faire des courses. Elle a été rapidement mise hors de cause, mais peut-on en dire autant des promoteurs qui sur l'emplacement de ce modeste pavillon, ont pu réaliser un petit immeuble de prestige?

The grin that takes over Sophie's face confesses her complicity in her father's death, and Jeanne beams at this confirmation of Sophie's guilt.

Aroused at the violence she now confirms in her friend, Jeanne leaves the table and lies seductively on her bed, gazes at Sophie, and flirtatiously questions her, "Tu ne l'as pas tué, ton père?" A new, confident and sexy Sophie, also aroused by the confirmation that her friend is as lethal as she suspected, responds by sauntering toward Jeanne who playfully beckons to her from the bed, beaming that "On n'avait rien pu prouver." Throwing herself next to Jeanne, she spoons her friend and starts to tickle the woman's side, under her breasts, and her arm. The two of them

burst into laughter and come just close enough to kiss, though they do not. The frenzied tickling and giggling of these two otherwise melancholic friends symbolize a lovemaking provoked by deep sexual desire for one and other's abject, violent, and criminal pasts. That Chabrol never brings it to the surface suggests yet another layer to the couple's queerness—only abject violence, and not sex, can mark their lovemaking. As Polack and Michelson observe, "Jeanne and Sophie derive more pleasure from eating sautéed mushrooms…from moments spent with television than they do from the very rare gestures of brief physical contact. Laughter and tickling are the only forms of orgiastic allusion" (85). Sexual attraction need not result in sex, a queer maneuver that resists the pressures of arousal and redirects the women's energy toward more violence. The allegorized intercourse signals that queerness resides in Sophie's and Jeanne's ability to share physical intimacy without succumbing to the normative gaze that may (or may not) desire to see two women have sex.

In fact, contrary to Polack and Michelson insistence that the film's gestures toward the pair's mutual desire

> don't explain the logic of a violent act. Rather, they enumerate, in disparate fashion, the moments of chance and of breaks that lead these women out of the banality of their relations, that create, extemporaneously, small shifts of power, crystals of pain, the couple's strange intimacy break social laws of sex and attraction, just as their violent acts violate the legal and moral codes of conduct. (86)

Rather than using lesbian intercourse to nourish the potential heteronormative desires of the film's viewers, violence reverses the indulgence of watching two women make love and replaces it with observing instead their cruelty.

Indeed, the next scene in which viewers glimpse their physical intimacy has no sex in it whatsoever, but exposes their desire nevertheless. Cuddled on the floor in front of Sophie's television with their arms wrapped tightly around each other, the women wear the matching hairstyle of braided pigtails. Both stare at the game show being broadcast with no expression, Jeanne making it clear that watching television together in Sophie's room, without the knowledge or consent of Georges and Catherine, is the manner in which they share intimacy: "Je peux venir demain? Il y a un film avec Alain Delon." Sophie's response positions their secret television watching as representative of their illegible sexuality: "Suffis de ne pas se faire voir." Just as their intercourse will never been seen either by viewers or by the Lelièvres, Sophie cautions her friend to move about undetected in the normative space of the household, a warning that reinforces the anti-scopophilic intentions of the scene.

4.3.4 "Elle est analphabète"

But stealth though the pair may be, their shared violence (the symbolic expression of intercourse) cannot remain unexpressed for long. Their abject desire quickly comes to a head throughout three final confrontations, each with a member of the Lelièvre family, that lead up to Jeanne's and Sophie's release of their "monster," per Magistrale, and to the murder of the Lelièvres. First, Georges arrives at the post office and accuses Jeanne of reading their mail, using her literacy, which holds such a spell over Sophie, as an instrument of deceit. Georges then forbids Sophie from granting Jeanne entry into their home, thus depriving the couple of their only intimacy. Finally, Sophie's secret of illiteracy, and her abject sexual draw to Jeanne, rise to the surface and she cannot bear the shame. Together, she and Jeanne indulge their Halperinian monsters and use their abject bond to harm the family.

Georges enters the post office intent on exposing Jeanne's snooping, revealing what is, for Georges, both an anti-social hyperliteracy that extends to the reading of his family's private materials, as well as a queer, anti-social misbehavior that Jeanne cannot or will not stop: Mademoiselle, regardez ces lettres. Elles ont été systématiquement réouvertes et récollées, très mal d'ailleurs. Et ce n'est pas la première fois. Mes paquets sont ouverts, aussi. Je viens vous prévenir que j'ai décidé de porter plainte." As in the case of her murdered daughter, Jeanne does not claim innocence, but maintains steadfastly that his accusations against her cannot be proven, replying, "De toute façon, je ne sais pas comment vous pouvez le prouver." As she has maintained the illegibility of her infanticide, she has covered evidence of reading the Lelièvres' mail and is proud that she has rendered the act so obscure.

When Georges responds that both of her crimes have not gone unnoticed, and that he deciphered her deceit just as he gained knowledge of her intimate friendship with Sophie, Jeanne becomes enraged. Viewers understand more about her hatred for the family, she never clarifies how she knows their secrets or why she cares so deeply:

> GEORGES: Vous vous en êtes déjà sortie une fois grâce à l'absence de preuve. Vous ne vous en tirez pas une deuxième fois. Ça serait trop facile.
>
> JEANNE: Moi, j'en sais plus sur vous que vous en savez sur moi…Je sais qui vous êtes, vous et votre famille. Je sais que votre femme, c'est un putain, et que l'autre, elle ne valait pas mieux. Ce n'est pas étonnant qu'elle s'est suicidée.

Georges slaps Jeanne across the face there, in the lobby of the post office, the site of her power. Though Jeanne does not retaliate in the moment, the slap should be seen as a direct interpellation of her brutal monster. The act cannot go unanswered, and Jeanne's next contact with Georges will be in the final moments of his life. Further, her challenge of Georges' knowledge—"j'en sais

plus sur vous que vous savez sur moi"—again situates Jeanne as the dominant source of knowledge in the film and thus fortifies her appeal in Sophie's eyes.

Georges exerts a similar absolute omniscience and control over Jeanne and her relationship with Sophie, contributing the mounting anger shared by the women. Even though Sophie cautions her friend to be careful not to be seen when she comes by to watch television, Gilles sees her anyway, leading Georges to prohibit the maid from inviting his family's stalker over again: "J'ai peur d'avoir quelque chose de désagréable à vous dire. Ma femme et moi, nous ne souhaitons pas intervenir dans votre vie privée. Vous fréquentez qui vous voulez. Mais nous ne souhaitons pas que votre amie vienne chez nous comme hier soir." His claim that he does not wish to interfere in Sophie's private life reaffirms, in fact, his patriarchal control over Sophie. As both her employer and her landlord, he exerts influence over her quality of life, and her secret of queer intimacy, of sharing her television with Jeanne, has been exposed, not unnoticed by the paternal household panopticon. In a small outburst that foretells of the violence awaiting the Lelièvres upon their discovery of her illiteracy, Sophie smashes a plate to the ground, furious that her clandestine relationship has been rendered legible. As the plate breaks into pieces, she glares at Georges and says, "Regardez ce que vous m'avez fait faire." The monster of her aggression begins to emerge in this scene, and she pinpoints its origin within the overbearing command exercised by her boss.

Two final confrontations take place between the housekeeper and her employers that compromise her ability to keep her illiteracy illegible. When Georges calls Sophie from work to tell her that he is sending a driver to collect some files from his home office, and that he needs her to search his library for the correct paperwork, Sophie, in a fit of immaturity and panic, hangs up on Georges and hides in her bedroom. Turning up the volume on a children's puppet

television show, *Les Minikeums*, she loses herself in the episode and ignores Georges' repeated returned calls as well as the arrival of his driver. The Minikeums introduce a curious level of intertextuality to the film that serves to remind viewers of Sophie's deeply reliant dependency on images. Georges sees through her lies and this time, Sophie realizes that her secret approaches full disclosure. She does not wear her rose-colored glasses in this scene, and her lies become quite transparent:

> GEORGES: Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé avec ce dossier, Sophie?
>
> SOPHIE: Je ne l'ai pas trouvé.
>
> GEORGES: En fait, il était là sous votre nez. Et quand le chauffeur est venu, il n'y avait personne.
>
> SOPHIE: J'étais allée faire les courses parce que le téléphone ne marchait plus.

He finds her lies to be inexcusable, but only Catherine clearly articulates the queerness of Sophie's strange behavior, pinpoint that Georges' request was "outside" her domain: "Il y a des choses qu'il ne faut pas lui demander. Passer les commandes, répondre au téléphone, ranger des livres, ce n'est pas son domaine." Because these tasks require literacy of Sophie, they in fact position her as the abject outsider situated beyond the realm of written language.

As close as Catherine and Georges come to uncovering Sophie's shame, it is Melinda who finally understands and uses "l'analphabetisme" to describe Sophie's distress, provoking the maid's anger and pushing her closer to committing murder. In this scene, the housekeeper already feels particularly sensitive about her condition—at the beginning of the conversation, Melinda wonders if Sophie knows that her name is Greek for *sagesse*. Embarrassed, the maid looks away. Melinda then asks Sophie to read her a quiz from a women's magazine, "Êtes-vous une salope?" When Sophie refuses, Melinda reads it instead. The first question gestures not

only toward Sophie's illiteracy, but to her homosexuality, as well: "Il vous annonce qu'il est amoureux d'un homme." By beginning the quiz with simply "Il," the text makes heteronormative assumptions that cannot apply to Sophie. The final potential answer to the question, "F. Vous l'exigez que cela reste secret," signifies that homosexual feelings are now among the things that Sophie keeps secret. Her illiteracy as well as her abject attraction to Jeanne bring her shame.

Melinda approaches Sophie's shame so closely that she physically touches it, playfully putting on the maid's rose-colored glasses. The instrument of concealment has thus become the instrument of revelation. Sophie realizes in horror that her secret is out and she stares at Melinda with tears in her eyes:

> MELINDA: Vous êtes dyslexique?
>
> SOPHIE: Eh?
>
> MELINDA: Vous ne pouvez pas lire? Vous ne savez pas? Vous auriez nous le dire, vous savez. Il y a plein de gens comme vous. Je peux vous apprendre, si vous voulez. L'autre jour à la télé, j'ai vu une émission sur ça, sur l'analphabetisme."

She identifies immediately Sophie's distance from language when the maid does not understand the word "dyslexique," which still associates her with language, but Melinda realizes that Sophie's problem is far more severe than dyslexia, and for the first time in the film, her handicap is openly named.

Sophie's tremendous shame renders her defensive and menacing, and she rebuffs Melinda's kindness with threats: "Si vous répétez à quelqu'un le mot que vous avez dit, je raconte à votre père que vous êtes enceinte. Si vous parlez, je raconte tout. Ce n'est pas moi la salope.

C'est vous. Vous n'avez qu'à vous mêlez à ce qui ne vous regarde pas." Sophie's shame is no longer a secret, and her warning to Melinda suggests that she will do anything to change that.

But Melinda, who runs and hides in her father's library, knowing that Sophie will not come after her if she is among books, has no intention of keeping the maid's secret:

> GEORGES: Qu'est-ce que tu as découvert de si terrible?
>
> MELINDA: Elle est analphabète.
>
> GEORGES: Quoi?
>
> CATHERINE: Ce n'est pas vrai!
>
> GEORGES: Mais oui; bien sûr. On aurait dû y penser…Comment croire que ça existe encore?
>
> CATHERINE: Oh, si!
>
> GEORGES: Imagine en avoir tellement honte!

Electing to fire Sophie, Georges correctly identifies the abject balance struck in the relationship between her and Jeanne: "Un qui ne sait pas lire, l'autre qui lit ce qui ne la regarde pas!" For each woman, their relationship to literacy renders them queer, Sophie as the anti-literate, and Jeanne as the hyper-literate. Sophie reacts wordlessly to being fired, rubbing her face as if she received the slap that Georges administered to Jeanne in the post office several days earlier. His aggression originated with Jeanne but culminates here. Telling the maid that "Dans un sens, je vous plains" relocates Sophie's abject self-pity away from herself, placing it now with the Lelièvres. Her hatred for herself transforms, and she joins Jeanne in making the family her enemy, signified as she caresses the empty spot on her bed where she usually embraces Jeanne.

4.3.5 The Intimacy of Murder

Abjective sexuality arises in the final scenes of the film as the pair indulges in murder, rather than intercourse, as a way of symbolizing their affection for each other. In this act, they defy both voyeurism and normativity and their queerness retains its illegibility. Cairns sees this maneuver as subtle enough to estrange the film's viewers:

> that lesbian desire is located between a couple of women encoded as pretty much gratuitously vicious (their motives for murder remain opaque, other than resentment of their socio-economic marginalisation vis-à-vis their privileged bourgeois target family), and likely only to alienate the spectator. (31)

Their violence does not alienate its viewers; it simply locates a sexuality and a sexual desire in a place that viewers may not think to look for it.

In fact, even though Jeanne's invitation to Sophie to move in with her symbolizes a more normative step towards officiating their desire, it is their murder of the Lelièvres that finally solidifies and consummates their relationship. The family watches a dramatization of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* in the library, a site that has heretofore been off-limits to shameful Sophie, while the maid and her friend enter through a side door and begin to vandalize the home. Sensing that the boundaries of their heteronormative family unit have been violated, Catherine urges Georges to investigate: "J'ai l'impression que la postière est là." The women's violence assumes the role of lovemaking. Each woman commandeers one of Georges' hunting rifles, the guns representing not just a male sex organ, but also mock the Phallus of a patriarchy that their crimes defy. Sophie is the first to discharge a weapon, shooting Georges twice. They then enter the library, furious and cruel, where their nearly simultaneous shooting should be seen to represent climax. They kill each remaining family member, both women making certain to shoot

at Georges' books, therefore victimizing the origin of Sophie's shame. The place of her shame becomes one of smug self-satisfaction. As Pierre Eisenreich drolly concludes, "Sophie était là sur la réserve, contrite par la détresse paranoïaque qu'engendre son analphabetisme. Mais, quand enfin elle détient l'arme, donc un pouvoir de vie ou de mort, elle règle définitivement ses comptes: elle peut alors 'nettoyer le salon' comme elle l'entend, apaisée" (72).

Surrounded by books but at ease for the first time, Sophie casually leans up against a bookshelf as Jeanne seductively sidles up to her and caresses her cheek. Though having committed the murders spontaneously, they agree to stage the scene to direct guilt away from themselves as if they had conspired to execute the family:

> JEANNE: On a bien fait. Il faudra que je m'en aille. Tu sauras comment faire?
>
> SOPHIE: Oui, je vais tout ranger.
>
> JEANNE: Après, il faut appeler à la police, leur dire que tu as tout trouvé comme ça.
>
> SOPHIE: Ils ne pourront rien prouver.

Their embrace at the door nearly results in a kiss, but Jeanne turns away and leaves the house. Even though their physical desire for each other is never fully expressed, the murders have occurred in response to each other's violent magnetism as an expression of their desire. Once again resisting the heteronormative stare of the camera, a gaze that is likely also situated within viewers, the couple cannot express this lust through lovemaking. The murders articulate an intercourse that is queer not only in desire—sexuality through violence—but in manifestation—violence as allegory for sex.

As Jeanne drives away from the mansion, she dies in a car accident. Sophie hears the sirens and walks down the lane to see them carrying her lover's body away on a stretcher. The

camera gives Sophie a slight close-up, and her face turns white in the light of the emergency vehicles. Beugnet sees her pallor, contrasted with the black of night behind her, as a the "probing of a wound," a sign to the audience to carefully consider the cruelty they have just witnessed: "Claude Chabrol's masterful *La Cérémonie* concludes on a striking image […] around the young woman's face, the background has suddenly vanished and she is surrounded by the deepest shade of black" (16). The close-up on the lack of color in Sophie's reminds the audience of the loss that has always been just beneath the surface of their violence. Like Jeanne, she becomes a corpse, symbolic of Sophie's loss of self as Jeanne, her only connection to information and to language, is gone for good. Sophie's final moments on screen reinforce this loss of self; as the camera pulls back, we watch her walk away from the scene of the accident and disappear into the darkness.

4.4 THE PROSTITUTE AND THE PORN STAR: *BAISE-MOI*

In *Baise-moi*, abject violence becomes yet again an allegory of intercourse. This queer desire is made possible by Manu, a lifelong victim of sexualization and an amateur porn actress, who resolves to become an agent of violent sex as a means of appeasing her own abuse, and her prostitute-cum-murderess friend Nadine. Where Chabrol uses vagueness and opacity to construct the abject, criminal desire between Jeanne and Sophie, female directors Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi employ explicit rape, graphic violence and vivid images of sexuality in order to illustrate the bond formed between prostitute Nadine and amateur pornographic actress Manu. In fact, Nadine and Manu, as well as character Karla (noted in the film's credits simply as "la copine de Manu") have all worked as professional pornographic actresses, and though the sex in

Baise-moi may not be real, it is utterly authentic. Based on Despentes' novel by the same name, the film showcases the couple as they embark on a journey to sate their voracious appetites for sex and for sadism.[39] Critics normally position the movie as a feminist or as a neo-feminist response to systems of patriarchal hegemony; the discussion that follows does not deny these claims, but the abject sexual and vicious currents that run between Manu and Nadine interest me far more.[40]

Like *La Cérémonie*, whose plot never reveals the mysterious reasons for Jeanne's obsession with the Lelièvres, viewers of *Baise-moi* never know exactly why Manu and Nadine become so violent. But also like *La Cérémonie*, as well as Genet's works, *Baise-moi* uses this mystery as a means to challenging social order. As Paulina Palmer notices,

> [t]he lesbian thriller, like its mainstream counterpart, includes within its parameters both the detective novel, which is characterized by an emphasis on the "puzzle" aspect of the crime and a film narrative closure resulting in an unequivocal reinstatement of social order, and the crime novel, which focuses on interests of a psychological nature and exposes acts of social injustice. (199)

The film's presentation of a puzzle it refuses to solve creates a queer framework that encases its queer acts. Linear though the story may be, questions about Manu, Nadine, and their personal histories consistently remain unanswered. Martine Beugnet also perceives the film's failure to resolve its issues as a central to its queerness: "*Baise-moi* derives its significance precisely from the refusal of a useful purpose" (54). But even without knowledge of the women's histories, just

[39] Despentes' novel *Baise-moi* will not be treated in this discussion because many of its principal scenes were deleted or rewritten for the screenplay, rendering the two works lightly different but in very important ways.
[40] Despentes recruited real-life porn actresses Raffaëlla Anderson and Karen Lancaume to realize Manu and Nadine.

simply understanding their violence in relation to their sexuality, and viewing the former as sexual impetus for the latter, helps us to make sense out of such spontaneous cruelty.

Nadine and Manu meet the very day that Nadine murders her roommate and witnesses the murder of her best friend, an afternoon during which Manu also murders her brother after being violently raped. Though neither woman admits to, or even references, the crime she has committed, each senses the monster within the other. Provoked by this appetite for abject criminality, they fuel the ensuing crime spree with sex, theft and murder. My discussion of *Baise-moi* focuses largely on the character of Manu, whose own self-loathing of her femaleness ultimately evolves into an assured confidence in her womanhood, gained through her experiences with violence and manifested in the agency she expresses during sex.

Though Nadine shares Manu's attraction to crime, violence, and sex, Nadine begins the film with an already well-solidified sense of self and the kind of confidence in her sexuality that Manu will only accrue over time. Nadine enjoys active self-employment as a prostitute and displays her sexuality unabashedly, her strong sense of self-esteem evident from her first scene in the film. Seated in a smoky bar, she seductively drags on her cigarette as she stares across the room at a man, compelling him to start a conversation with her. Whether he interests her for sex or for money is not clear, but Nadine's assurance that he could easily become one of her conquests cannot be mistaken. Even the bartender vouches for her prowess: "Je la connais. C'est une suceuse de premier."

Nadine's roommate walks in on her masturbating to a scene from John Love's 1997 "women in prison" cult classic *Prison*. The scene is clearly a favorite for Nadine, and she rewinds it over and over again until her roommate interrupts her: "Tu es vraiment malade!" Nadine complies with her request to shut it off, but mocks her roommate's modesty by playfully

chiding, "Tu ne peux pas aller dans la cuisine, s'il te plaît? Je préfère me masturber devant la télé. J'en ai marre de toujours faire ça dans la chambre."

4.4.1 Womanhood and the Shame of Self

As in the case of Sophie, it is first necessary to understand how Manu's abject sense of shame nourishes the abject sexual relationship that she comes to share with Nadine, for it is only through this friendship that she displays self-awareness and appreciation. Just as viewers immediately understand Nadine's assertive self-assuredness, Manu's self-loathing, which stems from the nearly constant victimization pursuant to her very womanhood, is also readily apparent in the opening scenes of the film. Prior to the crime spree, men do not treat Manu with respect. Her own brother mistreats and abuses her physically and psychologically, and her numb reaction to being kidnapped and gang-raped by several strangers suggests that she is accustomed to sexual assault. Manu's lack of self-worth can be perceived in her appearance, as she dresses in over-sized, and probably men's, baggy pants, sweat shirts, hats, and coats. She exercises her self-loathing through an over-indulgence in stimulant substances, though her drug use is more under-stated than in the novel version of *Baise-moi*.

Manu's shame augments over the course of three scenes that take place over the course of one afternoon: with her brother prior to her sexual assault, the rape itself, and again with her brother just after the rape. On her way to spend time with fellow drug user Karla, Manu stops at her brother's bar to borrow money; in fact, she relies entirely on her brother for financial support and even lives with him. He insults her for the kind of company she keeps: "Qu'est-ce que tu fais encore avec cette putain de junkie, ce déchet là? Tu vas vraiment foutre ta putain de vie, ou quoi?" He then throws a glass at Manu, narrowly missing her head. She ducks submissively to

miss the glass, rising again slowly and staring back at her brother, her hurt and anger obvious on her face. Understanding that retaliation will result in even greater violence from her brother. She smiles at him, almost coquettishly, choosing not to react to his physical abuse when she asks him for money. His mistreatment does not waiver, and before lending her money, he tells her, "Il faut toujours que ça dégènère avec toi. Tu es un vrai poison." The tension between Manu and her brother recalls that of an abusive spouse—the violence becomes emotional when physical violence has been exhausted, and Manu's only recourse is to bear the brunt of his aggression in order to diffuse the situation. Her friend, watching from outside the bar, chastises Manu's passive approach to dealing with her brother—"Pourquoi tu t'es laissée faire?"—thus foreshadowing the Manu's future aggression toward her brother and gesturing toward Manu's self-hatred. She cannot stand up for herself, sharing her brother's investment in her abject condition.

Later, drinking along the riverbanks, her friend tells Manu of the cruel and misogynistic stories circulating about Manu among the men of their *banlieue*: "Ils t'ont vue tournée dans des films de cul, avec des détails bien croustillants. J'ai trouvé ça vraiment déguelasse." That Manu has performed in amateur pornography does not convey the same sense of sexual confidence that viewers see in Nadine's enthusiastic expressions of sexuality. While listening to her friend tell of the gossip, she stares sadly at the ground. Her eventual response is laced with false bravado as she replies, reclining into the grass with pseudo-confidence, "Il ne fallait pas me le dire. Qu'est-ce que tu veux que je dise, moi?…Je suis au courant. Que j'en ai à foutre? Je leur shitte tous dessus. Un par un, tu me les amènes, je les aligne, et je leur fais caca dessus."

That their rapists arrive at this very moment, interrupting their conversation, directly challenges Manu's boldness and reinforces her self-loathing; she has neither the desire nor the

energy to defend herself. The rape scene that follows reveals that, rather than demonstrating the active violence that Manu describes to her friend, she regards them instead with passive contempt and she makes no attempt either to flee their clutches, or to fight off her attackers. Viewers are not privy to the kidnapping of the women—the rape scene simply begins with the men driving their captives into an abandoned warehouse. That the kidnapping occurs in broad daylight, and that none of the men bother to cover their faces, or the license plate to the car, or to wear a condom suggests that they have no fear of the women identifying them or reporting the crime to the police. These men have unfettered access to any violence they wish to perpetrate.

Karla, beaten by the rapists, screams for help and begs the rapists to stop. She twists and writhes her frail, drug-addicted body in an effort to delay the rape. Covered in blood, her legs are wrenched apart and the audience is given a close-up of a rapist forcing his penis inside her. It is this close-up of her vagina being forcibly penetrated that introduces the coupling of sex and violence to the film, an intention that introduces to viewers the fact that *Baise-moi*, though controversial, is not unique in considering the relationship of sex to violence. The shock value of the graphic depiction of the assault originates from the assumption that most viewers are unfamiliar with transparency regarding rape, despite the fact that the United Nations estimates that 70% of the world's women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. It happens with tremendous frequency but remains a carefully guarded secret that, even when disclosed, is never depicted in explicit and vivid detail. Despentes and Trinh Thi thus make the point that despite the difficult content of *Baise-moi*, sex and violence already share a certain indivisible relationship off-screen, whether the public directly acknowledges that or not.

In fact, as Scott MacKenzie has pointed out, the public may even acknowledge it with a certain amount of precision. Writing of the extensive censorship that *Baise-moi* suffered at the

time of its release, he references the British Board of Film Classification's refusal to release the movie with this rape scene:

> What is also of note in the BBFC's decision is its claim that cutting the scene of penetration from the rape is done in order to eliminate the possibility of the spectator viewing the act as sexually stimulating or pornographic. Yet, this point is undercut by the fact that the rape itself provokes an intense sense of unease. Furthermore, in terms of the film's formal strategies, the rape is not structured in a manner consistent with heterosexual, hardcore imagery. (322)

The scene, then, serves to showcase sex and violence as they already co-habitate, as well as to show the audience more about Manu's self-loathing. Martine Beugnet also concludes that the shot was "condemned as an eroticisation of sexual assault and yet […] the absence of depth characteristic of the video image renders the sequence as a whole as untitillating as it is bleak and horrifying" (53).

In contrast to Karla's desperate movements and cries for help, Manu remains largely motionless and nearly wordless throughout her rape, responding only with quiet disdain to her rapist's criticism of her failure to react with fear:

> MEC VIOL 1: J'ai l'impression de baiser un zombie.[41] Tu peux bouger ton cul un peu?
>
> MANU: Qu'est-ce que tu crois que tu as entre les jambes, connard?

The bravado is once again false, and her disdain, though genuine, does not compare to the exceptional self-loathing she reveals after the rape.

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[41] In Despentes' novel *Baise-moi*, the line reads "J'ai l'impression de baiser un cadavre" (55). Replacing "cadavre" with "zombie" foreshadows the carnage that Manu and Nadine will eventually perpetrate; dead bodies are victims of death, but zombies overcome death and self-resurrect to take lives on their own.

Karla, bleeding and despondent, screams at Manu for "letting herself be done" like that:

> KARLA: Comment tu as pu? Comment tu as pu te laisser faire comme ça? Putain, Manu, comment tu as pu faire ça?
>
> MANU: C'est bien à côté de ce qu'ils peuvent faire. On est encore en vie, non?
>
> KARLA: Putain, comment tu peux dire ça? Comment tu peux dire ça?
>
> MANU: Je peux dire ça parce que je n'ai rien à foutre de leurs pauvre bites de branleur…je les emmerde. C'est comme une voiture que tu gares dans une cité. Tu ne laisses pas de trucs de valeur à l'intérieur si tu ne veux pas empêcher que ça soit forcée. Ma chatte, je ne peux pas empêcher les connards d'y entrer, je n'y ai rien laissé de précieux. Ce n'est jamais qu'un coup de queue; on n'est jamais que des filles…maintenant, ça va aller.

Karla's stunned response is a reaction to Manu's non-normative reaction to sexual assault; it does not scare her. The sex was clearly not consensual, so we cannot say that her comments reveal anything about her personal relationship to desire, though they certainly do reveal much about her relationship to normative behaviors. A fully reasonable, and unquestionably expected, reaction to sexual assault is terror and panic; Manu's queerness emerges here as we see the abnormality of her passive victimization. Justifying the rape by saying "On n'est jamais que des filles" further demonstrates her hatred for her womanhood; she expects to be raped. Her reference to her "chatte" as containing nothing of value speaks directly to the way that Manu views herself. She believes that her vagina, representative of Manu as a whole person during the sexual attack, can and even should be violated because nothing could damage it or her more than that which has already occurred. Positioning her vagina, the Saussurian signifier of her womanhood, as meaningless suggests that Manu believes her own life to be without meaning.

Beugnet has argued that the scene itself positions both women as abject and refused figures:

> Initially caught in medium shot, the two women are sitting on the floor of the disused warehouse where they have just been attacked. The frame includes a large portion of the checked ground, covered in grime and dust, and through the flattening, colour-levelling effect of the video image, the figures seem to be crushed into their surroundings. (53)

Placing the women on the filthy floor reinforces the abjection of the scene and of the attack, which is the initial motorization of Manu's appetite for abjection. As Pascale Molinier has observed, "Notons que c'est sur cette expérience du vide affectif, sur cette expérience de néantisation de la subjectivité, que va se déployer, secondairement, la violence de la jeune femme, meurtres et sévices partagés avec une autre femme ont le pouvoir de la faire se sentir vivante" (63).

Manu's self-loathing becomes unbearable when her brother blames her for being raped. The same afternoon, noticing evidence of the rape, his concern turns to a fury that gives way to disdain for his sister:

> LE FRÈRE DE MANU: C'est quoi, ces bleus? C'est quoi, ces bleus? C'est quoi, ces bleus?
>
> MANU: C'est les sales connards dans ton genre. Il faut toujours qu'ils frappent sur quelqu'un. Ça leur sent exister.
>
> LE FRÈRE DE MANU: Tu es encore fort brouillée. Tu es toujours défoncé, toi. Tu es toujours défoncé. Tu n'as pas fait violée? Tu n'as pas fait violée? Qui? Qui? Qui? Qui?

He takes out his gun as he demands to know who raped Manu, but the repetition of his questions gestures more toward his disgust for his sister than toward any sense of protection he might feel for her. Accusing her of being confused and under the influence of drugs—"Tu es encore fort brouillée. Tu es toujours défoncée."—reduces her attack first to a drug-induced hallucination that then immediately transforms into a personal assault on her brother rather than a sexual assault on Manu. Her recognition of the disparity in his reaction results in perhaps the most pivotal moment of the film, for though Nadine also murders her roommate at the very same time, only Manu does so as a reversal of her self-loathing and as a rearticulation of abjection from self-abjection, to abjective violence. Attacking him, she yells, "Tu n'as même pas l'idée de demander comment je vais," and shoots him with his own gun when he taunts her: "Tu n'as pas l'air trop traumatisée. Putain, tu me dégoûtes. Salope, salope." Her brother's insult points directly at Manu's abject condition—"tu me dégoûtes"—but as repulsed as he may feel, the camera reveals that he cannot take his eyes off Manu, filming him straight on as he stares at her and intentionally grazes his eyes up and down her body.

From here, Manu's inwardly projected sense of abject self-hatred, produced from both sexed and from sexualized victimization, redirects into an abject violence that she not only perpetrates, but that she also requires in order to gain sexual agency and a solidified sense of self. Tina Chanter, in anti-Kristevan reading of the role of abjection in identity, illustrates the power of such abject moments within film and their role in signaling the transfer of that power:

> Abject moments can put into crisis imaginaries by exposing their instability. As such they can provide opportunities for reworking identificatory mechanisms. The deferral and production of abject moments in film can facilitate and disrupt identification in ways that make available for reflection and interrogation the

> imaginary operations that we usually take to be indicative of who we are, of our identities and the identity of others. Equally, abject moments can be used to shore up identities whose stability has been threatened in the wake of breaching boundaries that might have been assumed to be unassailable. (3)

Manu now begins to interrogate her identification with victimhood and immediately launches a campaign by which abjection, sex and violence infuse her lack of self-assurance with independence and autonomy. This campaign, however, does not feature self-affirming properties and healthy choices; her independence must be gained at the expense of the lives of others. By pursuing sexual encounters that stimulate her—both sex with men and the allegorical sex through violence that she shares with Nadine—Manu reworks traditional concepts of self-esteem by putting her safety, as well as Nadine's, at risk over the course of their violent crime spree.

4.4.2 Manu Meets her Match

Manu's initial queerness lies in this refusal to prize her own safety. She leaves a violent environment in which she has no control for a violent environment that she controls, leading to a secondary sense of queerness as she shares with Nadine a desire for violent sex. A suggestion that the cinematic presentation of *Baise-moi* may be told, in a way, by protagonist Nadine arrives by way of her first encounter with Manu. Viewers watch her exit a subway, headphones on, the only sound of the scene belonging to loud music. Manu, entering the subway, inexplicably reaches out and touches Nadine. As Nadine removes the headphones, the background music immediately diminishes, the viewers realizing that they have been experiencing the last fifteen seconds of the film strictly from Nadine's perspective. Manu's strange attraction to Nadine, a stranger, should be read as symbolic of an interruption to an event already in-progress, as a queer

intervention in a normative process. And even after getting Nadine's attention, Manu cannot tell Nadine exactly what it is she wants:

> NADINE: Eh?
>
> MANU: Je ne sais pas.

As if she senses within Nadine an unsharpened instrument intended for attack, Manu recognizes in the prostitute a shared propensity for impulsive cruelty. Her invitation to leave town in her brother's car immediately appeals to Nadine, she, too, understanding that she has encountered something of a kindred spirit.

That their crimes are acknowledged neither in this moment, nor at any point during the film, reinforces the queerness of their mutual attraction. Maximilian Le Cain writes,

> Bach walks through a subway, her ears plugged into a walkman, the beat of her music loud on the soundtrack, perhaps indicating her need to submerge feeling in pure sensation, as provided by the beat of the music. The camera tracks her to the exit where she passes Anderson who grabs her. She removes her headphones and it is only then that they audience realises the source of the music. This synchronicity is presumably a factor in their relationship but they never discuss the past, at least not on screen. Nothing they do is theorised or explained by them. (3)

The first attraction for Manu and Nadine is thus an unnamed violence, and though Le Cain is correct that they do not overtly explain their actions, the increasing connectedness of their sexuality with violent crime explains instead that theirs is a non-normative relationship nourished by abjection.

4.4.3 En Route

The non-normativity of Nadine's and Manu's relationship is signaled by the non-linear trajectory taken on their road trip. The pair has no particular destination, referring occasionally and in only vague terms to where their road trip together will lead them: "dans les Vosges," "à la plage," "vers Paris." Their journey follows no map and they have no plan. The only factor of which the women are certain during their crime spree is that it must, at all costs, feature violence.[42] Their road trip thus leads them only ever closer to the risk to which their abject violence always exposes them: death. My analysis in this discussion establishes the abject sex and violence that sustain the women's friendship while demonstrating that like Sophie, Manu uses this friendship to regain a sense of self-confidence that had been corroded by her abject self-loathing.[43]

On the road to anywhere, Nadine is the first to acknowledge a sexual attraction to Manu, though similarly to Jeanne and Sophie, the friends only skirt around their attraction to each other:

> NADINE: Tu n'as pas fait des films porno? Sérieux?
>
> MANU: Comment ça se fait que tu connais ça? Ton copain, il est porté là-dessus?
>
> NADINE: Je n'ai pas de copain. Je suis portée sur la chose toute seule.
>
> MANU: Pour toi, qu'est-ce que tu veux que je te dise?

Nevertheless, Nadine's independent interest in pornography and her earlier admission that her masturbation occurs regularly situate her outside of normativity and signify her queerness.

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[42] Their accrual of guns and money, even in addition to what Manu has already stolen from her brother, gesture toward their intention to continue their mayhem.

[43] All of the murders committed by Nadine and Manu relate in some, however small, way to their abjective sexual connection. Only those most pertinent to Manu's solidifying sense of self and departure from self-loathing will be discussed here.

Though she has sex for a living, the only indication that viewers have heretofore of her sexual desire manifesting as sexual activity is through masturbation to pornography. She has therefore likely already masturbated, engaging in autoerotic (and thus queer) sex, to pornographic images of Manu.

Manu insists she wants go with Nadine toward Paris, but then changes her mind and orders her to drive them to the beach. Viewers are not privy to much of their time together en route, just as Nadine and Manu never disclose details about their respective murders, but by their arrival at the coast the women are dedicated to each other, and Manu's claim that they somehow fulfill a destiny to connect marks the beginning of her journey out of self-loathing:

> MANU: Si tu veux, tu prends la caisse et tu tires, quoi. Je vais déjeuner. Tu fais quoi?
>
> NADINE: Je ne sais pas. Je déjeune avec toi.

They smile and hug, Nadine bursting into tears, seemingly at the thought of leaving Manu. Manu returns her embrace and appears completely serene as if her self-hatred beings already to dissipate. They do not plan anything beyond simply having lunch, but tightness of their embrace suggests that their journey must continue out of mutual need.

Both Nadine and Manu designate the *déjeuner* as an important site of beginning for their friendship, because it is there that they acknowledge the queerness of their initial encounter by only indirectly referencing their murderous pasts:

> NADINE: C'est quand-même surprenant qu'on s'est rencontré dans ce genre là.
>
> MANU: Non, ce n'est pas surprenant. C'était le moment où jamais.

Manu counters that their meetings was not "surprenant"; indirectly, she is identifying Nadine's latent violence when she says "c'était le moment où jamais," as if aware that she needed to capitalize on the passing of this stranger the moment she saw Nadine.

Seated at the lunch table, Nadine and Manu make their relationship official, their language performative by rendering them "ensemble" as friends, if not necessarily as a couple:

NADINE: Il n'y a nulle part où j'ai envie d'aller.

MANU: Je propose qu'on reste ensemble d'ici là.

Manu's gesture toward "là," indicating a fixed future point until which the women will stay together, predicts the eventual loss that the friendship must experience. As in Sophie and Jeanne's case, the abject nature of their sexual investment in brutal behaviors can only lead toward death; here, Manu signals her own eventual murder.

4.4.4 Sex, Self-Knowledge and Sadism

Manu's shedding of her abject self-loathing begins immediately, foreshadowed by the sense of peace she expressed while in Nadine's arms. Their first act of physical indulgence takes place in a hotel room. Stripped to their underwear, the women dance provocatively with each other, appearing in brief instances to do so with the intention to stimulate arousal. They do not speak in this scene, and the camera follows the women around the room as they dance. The genuine smiles they exchange and the uninhibited nature with which they move suggests a liberation on the part of both women, but it is Manu that appears to truly give in to feelings of sexual agency. In fact, the camera favors Manu and it documents more of her dancing, which becomes almost as joyful as it is seductive, than it does Nadine's, who at times distances herself from Manu slightly so that she, too, benefits from a better view of her eager dancing. Viewers have already seen Nadine in enticing lingerie, but it is here that Manu shows her own body for

the first time, unsheathed of her previous heavy and bulky clothing, yet another mark of her burgeoning appreciation for her female body. Her comfort level at dancing nearly naked signals a burgeoning self-appreciation.

It is surprising to note that under her masculine attire, she has been wearing black nylon pantyhose, which she does not remove during the dancing. That she has revealed them now bears great symbolism for the sexuality she encounters in relationship to abject violence—they become critical signifiers of her desire in the days to come. Indeed, Manu uses her stockings to signify her sexual subjectivity as they become a ritualized and unique part of her sexual repertoire over the course of the film.

The same evening, the pair commits their first crimes together, robbing a woman at a cash machine and murdering her with the gun that Manu has stolen from her brother. Exhilarated by the pleasure of killing, they find a bar and search for sex, Manu philosophizing, "Il faut beaucoup boire à partir de maintenant. On est attrapé du loup. Le plus que tu baises, le moins que tu cogites, le mieux que tu dors." The association of sex with violence has now come full circle—while each other's covert violence was previously stimulating, their shared and overt cruelty will motorize their sexual encounters from this point on. The women have also clearly been shopping; Manu's dress is markedly more sexual and feminine, though she still does not rival the revealing clothing of Nadine.

The imagery of the sexual intercourse that ensues symbolizes the women's non-realized attraction for one another, and it gives us a closer look at the confidence that Manu gleans from the abjective friendship she shares with Nadine. Both women take a different lover but they have sex with their partners in the same room, at the same time, on identical twin beds. From across the room, they exchange stares, taking in the images of each other having sex. Their

arousal stems from perceiving each other's arousal. Lisa Downing correctly analyzes their gazes as reflective of their mutual, but also mutually experienced, sexual desire:

> This is not a case of the "transvestite" female gaze, that false-consciousness-provoked usurping of the masculine position, but rather the surprising presentation of a pair of reflecting, desiring gazes that confirm and authenticate the other's desire, creating an inter-subjective inter-visual realm […] That Manu and Nadine are literally, socially *hors la loi* is necessary and appropriate, as it echoes their condition of looking and desiring from a position that is on the margins of the laws of spectatorship but that inevitably references them as all transgressive gestures and discourses reference the limits they seek to exceed. (59)

The exceptionally graphic abject sex and violence in *Baise-moi* effectively exceeds the limits they reference (its censorship in many countries evidences that). The desire of the scene is queer in content and in manifestation.

The camera closes in so tightly on the women's bodies that it is often difficult to tell whose body is being filmed and when, suggesting not just a fusion of the two women, but also the notion that their bodies are entwined and thus inseparable from each other's. As the camera backs away from their bodies, viewers understand that Manu and Nadine watch each other, as Downing claims: "We focus on Nadine's face and see that she is looking across at Manu. Pleasure and desire are visible on her face, but they seem to be directed through her gaze at the other, and not to emanate from the physical action she is engaging in with her sexual partner" (60). The close-ups thus imply that the women are making love to each other through their gaze.

Beugnet, in turn, sees the relationship of abjection to the cinematic close-up as one of metamorphosis. She claims that "[i]n effect, the way [close-up] pulls in the gaze, the close-up is the perfect tool for capturing the process of metamorphosis of a body from form to formlessness, becoming a deformed and unrecognizable entity from which, in turn, form emerges" (102). The scene thus unfolds as a transfiguration from Manu's insecure, victimized and self-loathing subjectivity to one of much greater confidence and self-awareness.

Indeed, the entire sex scene appears directed in some way by Manu. She undresses, but rather than removing her pantyhose, she rips the garment at the juncture where her legs meet her body, permitting her to gain penetration with the material still on. The variety of stockings she chooses are known in English as "control-top," as they feature a small girdle in the waist area of the garment, adding a strange combination of prudishness, vanity and power to her presentation. Manu's shredding of the material thus indicates a real chance in agency and self-interest on her behalf. It is also of note that throughout the entire encounter, Manu positions herself on top of her lover.

What happens next represents one of the most queer maneuvers of the film in which Manu's use of abject sexuality and violence position her ever further from the self-loathing she expresses what may be just a few days prior to this scene. When given the opportunity to engage in intercourse on their own, the women decline. This refusal should not be seen as a feminist response to the request of a man (known in the film credits as "le grand mec") for further titillation, but rather a sexual, anti-normative device that assigns the power of the encounter to Manu alone, almost as if Nadine defers to her friend and leaves decisions about further intercourse up to Manu:

LE GRAND MEC: Savez ce qui serait sympa, les filles? Ça serait de me faire un petit soixante-neuf.

MANU: Dégage.

The man follows her order without question and leaves immediately. He looks at Nadine questioningly, but that the camera does not show the audience her reaction to Manu's command reminds us that Manu controls the sexuality of the scene. As he leaves, Manu caresses her lover and gestures to him to join Nadine across the room, winking and grinning at her friend as if she is a child who has just shared a toy. In doing so, she has exerted control over every participant in the room, dictating who has sex with whom and who is disinvited. Cairns finds this moment of resistance to be true defiance of regulated sexual norms. When the women are given the chance share intimacy, at the request of a man and for the benefit of viewers, Manu declines: "What Manu's mordant response forecloses is not the possibility of lesbian sex, but the risk of male voyeurism framing and delimiting lesbian sex" (141). The couple must locate their intimacy elsewhere—through violence—in order to defy panopticonian voyeurism.

The distance that Manu very quickly puts between the woman victimized by the men of her community and the woman exerting control over each of the sexualities present in the hotel room denotes her progress toward subjectivity. Krzywinska has identified that queer sex may in fact dismantle sexual subjecthood, but only one that has been socially sanctioned. Transgressive sex, in fact, peels back layers of culturally imposed identities and reveals new ways of connecting with the ego:

> When the laws that govern the shaping of identity are violated, the limits of the culture are reinforced and, as such, culturally determined identity is dependent on an individual's direct experience of transgression. When an individual

> transgresses the limits of a culture, shame or anguish is felt. For sexual subjecthood, this means that the subject has to repress or deny aspects of sexuality and desire which do not conform to the dominant model […] For some people the experience produced by transgression is a liberating pleasure of ego-loss, for others the pleasure of transgression is control and power. (189)

I argue that Manu's shedding of the hegemonic sexual subjecthood of the victim, and her recovery of sexual agency and identity through abject sex and violence, produce both the freedom of ego-loss (for she understands that their game as a fatal endpoint), as well as the intoxication of control and power that she would never possess were it not for the abjection present in their sexually infused cruelty.

4.4.5 Blood, Sex, and Vomit

This progress owes much to her abject relationship with Nadine, whose intimacy grows as the following three scenes unfold in relationship to Manu's vagina, to her womanhood, and to their shared violence by showing us initially Manu's vagina, then another murder, and then her genitals once again. First, Nadine walks in on Manu in the bathroom and criticizes her friend's grooming standards:

> MANU: Je suis coupée partout.
>
> NADINE: C'est ridicule comme ça.
>
> MANU: Tu ne comprends rien. C'est cool comme ça.

This scene demonstrates not only their incredible closeness, but also Manu's clumsy attempt at making her vagina, the signifier of her femaleness, more visible by shaving her bikini area. Accidentally cutting herself represents the ever-present violence in her sexuality. Nadine

perceives her friend's vagina—even has opinions about it—reinforcing the sexuality present in their friendship.

In the very next scene, the partnership has become so close that Manu refers to herself, during their murder of the owner of a gun shop, as Nadine's wife: "Et si sa femme est la maîtrise de *Tire au canard*?" Immediately following this murder, we are back in the same bathroom with Manu, where Nadine interrupts her once again. This time, however, Manu's genitals do not bleed because she has cut them, but because she menstruates. Perched on the sink and naked from the waist down, Manu watches menstrual fluid ooze from her vagina into the basin of the sink. Judging by the amount of blood, she has been in this position for quite a while, fascinated by and proud of this biologically unique mark of femaleness. Beaming with pride, both that Nadine has interrupted her and of her bloody mess, Manu tells Nadine that she has always enjoyed marking her territory in this way: "Quand j'étais gamine, je faisais exprès tout tâcher pour faire chier ma mère. Ça la rendait carrément malade. Putain! Ça donne envie de niquer!" Though the blood may have been abject for her mother, menstruating has always empowered Manu, even despite rendering her mother "carrément malade," a reference to the square and rigid parameters of dominant sexual and corporeal norms. Krzywinska, expanding upon Kristeva's perspectives of bodily fluids and abjection, suggests that something like menstrual fluid may cloud a sense of subjectivity:

> Bodily fluids, for instance, disrupt or violate the boundaries which constitute the illusion of subjecthood. Bodily fluids are bits of the body which have become unattached from the body. The ambiguous status of these non-objects (are they me or not me?) threaten the subject's illusion of continuity and narcissistic integrity. The problem is that they cannot be "properly" regarded as either subject

> or object as they violate or transgress the differential distinction between the two. The experience of these non-objects may be double-edged; disgust may be violated by (an unholy) fascination which disrupts the separation of subject and object and transgresses the boundary through ambiguity. (195)

Manu's menstrual blood, however, reminds not just viewers but also Manu and Nadine, of the biological powers latent in her femaleness. Rather than viewing the non-object that exits her body as a menace to her sense of self, Manu feels no ambiguity whatsoever. Moving even further away from her prior sense of self-hatred, the expulsion of bodily fluids, either by force or organically, and the re-appropriation of such abject excretions inspires Manu not only to "niquer," but to murder, as well.

Bodily discharge plays an important role in the sadistic sex that results from Manu's hormonal enthusiasm. By now filthy with sexual self-assurance, she wears an animal-print skirt when she and Nadine entice a man in a casino to invite them to his hotel room. Ripping the gusset of her pantyhose to expose her genitals and thus signifying total control, Manu attempts to initiate intercourse with the stranger, known in the credits only as "le connard à capote." He refuses to do so without a condom:

> MANU: Juste ta bite, et sans rien.
>
> LE CONNARD À CAPOTE: C'est stupide, même pour toi, de faire ça sans précautions…Je ne peux pas faire ça. C'est contre mes principes.

Manu exemplifies the Halperinian risk of abjective sex here, wishing to engage in her own variety of bareback sex. His rejection of unprotected sex with her enrages Manu, infuriated at being deprived of the risky sex she seeks. He asks her instead for oral sex, and she replies, "Tu as de la chance que j'ai la conscience féminine," referencing indirectly the sense of self she has

accumulated as a result of owning her femaleness. But as she fellates him, Manu intentionally gags herself and vomits all over his penis. Producing the abject bodily fluid of vomit bears the same impact on Manu as her menstrual fluid has had, and she appears giddy with self-assurance as wipes the vomit from her mouth. Her pleasure instantly evolves into a violent rage, hateful at being deprived of sex, and Manu repeatedly head-butts the man: "Mec, ce qu'on n'a pas aimé chez toi, c'est la capote. Tu n'es plus masqué, mec. Tu es un connard à capote. On ne suit pas les filles qu'on ne connaît pas, mec, parce qu'en l'occurrence tu sais sur qui tu t'es tombé, mec? Sur les putain tueuses de connards à capote!" If she cannot receive pleasure from sex, Manu relies on her abject monster to assure that she receives it from humiliation and cruelty. Nadine joins her in the assault and they beat the man to death.

4.4.6 *Le Club de Cul* and Allegorical Abject Intercourse

Sexual and violent tensions coalesce for Nadine and Manu when they enter a swingers' club, a site of hedonism that meets the members' overindulgence in sexuality with the couple's overindulgence in murder. This comingling of danger and desire allegorize intercourse for the couple, once again resisting a normative wish to see physical intimacy between women on screen. Their motive in the club is not to commit robbery, the criminal field that has generated much of their murder, and given Nadine's intimate caresses of woman in mid-coitus after their arrival, they have come to participate with its members. But a man's unwanted advances toward Manu, which reference the complicated identity politics of being a woman in France with a Franco-Maghrebi background, cause her feelings of self-loathing to surface. The man, identified in the film's credits as simply "la truie," touches her on the shoulder:

MANU: Je ne crois pas une seconde comment tu me touches.

LA TRUIE: On est dans un club de cul ici. On n'est pas à la mosquée.

Manu initially physically assaults him by beating his head against the bar, but the violence that follows, far more severe than any other cruelty perpetrated by the couple, conforms to the film's previously established pattern of inexplicable choices. Nadine and Manu each draw their guns, amounting to one in each hand for Nadine, and they spontaneously murder every person in the club. Most of their victims die during intercourse, suggesting that the reason for the brutality must be traced directly to their blatant displays of sexuality, a connection that Georges Bataille has called inevitable, as sexuality and death each exist as companions, only possible by virtue of the other.[44]

The final murder committed in this scene comingles abject sexuality, abject violence, and abject humiliation in a matter of less than a minute. Manu requires the man to get on all fours, drop his pants, and oink like a pig. She inserts her pistol into his anus and fires.[45] Symbolically, Manu and Nadine sodomize him. The violence they enact throughout the building, murdering each club-goer as they go, allegorizes a crescendo of mounting sexual tension that has refused to indulge the voyeurism of men and of the camera. Their desire manifests, then, as violence. Anne Delabre and Didier Roth-Bettoni also perceive this anti-voyeuristic queer gesture:

> Ce film "coup de poing" utilise des codes visuels du porno pour […] mettre les voyeurs face à leur voyeurisme […] La relation entre les deux femmes est en revanche empreinte d'amour mais aussi de pudeur, à l'inverse des films érotico-

[44] My reading of Bataille's discussion of eroticism and death, present in his philosophical work *L'Érotisme*, appears in detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

[45] Despentes likely cites two former sets of violent circumstances, one cinematic and one historical, in this attack: the anal rape of an outdoorsman in John Boorman's *Deliverance*, and the murder of Federico García Lorca in 1936 at the hands of Spanish fascists, one of whom fired a bullet into the poet's anus.

> soft habituels, on n'y voit aucune scène de sexe entre elles pour exiter les males. (203)

The couple understands the scopophiliac power in indulging their sexual attraction on camera. After all, Anderson and Lancaume perform as pornographic actresses in their prior cinematic work. Manu's and Nadine's refusal of sex punishes any curiosity or desire that may be present on the part of viewers with disturbing and bloody violence. Their intercourse *is* murder, replacing normative acts of desire with non-normative acts of bloodshed.

The queerness of the scene also resides in the irony of Manu, a porn star, and Nadine, a prostitute, using their non-normative heterosexualities and non-normative heterosexual practices to oppose the dominant heteronormative ideologies that they see espoused in the club's members. As Le Cain has observed,

> [I]t must be remembered that in the preceding mass murder, the heroines killed everyone in the club, both men and women. And it is this hellish scene of indiscriminate destruction pouring down on these copulating bodies that best encapsulates *Baise-moi*'s bleak vision, an almost apocalyptic view of heterosexuality, a loveless, predatory sexuality that has everything to do with the sex-industry perception and marketing of body as object for exploitation and sometimes abuse. (3)

Though Le Cain may be right that Despentes and Trinh Thi use the scene exclusively to criticize the sex industries that they represent, its graphic nature joins the rape of Manu and Karla as the two scenes in *Baise-moi* that are extremely difficult to watch. The impact of the scene, therefore, is not intended for Nadine's and Manu's victims, but rather for the audience, who are intended to understand, as in the rape scene, of the violence that always exists as a latent component of

sexuality. As Owen Heathcote observes regarding the live media reports of the tragedies at the World Trade Center, the repetition of such sexualized violence, from the rape scene to the murder in the sex club, takes on a life of its own: "In the same way as ABC replayed the attacks on the World Trade Center from a variety of positions and angles, so does *Baise-moi* replay its cinematic predecessors and ever tighten the links and the loops between violence and its representations" (3). The more the audience sees sex and violence intermingled, the more real their association becomes.

The scene at the swingers' bar replaced a key part of the textual version of *Baise-moi*, in which the greatest carnage of the work involved the murder of a child and grandmother in a candy store, as well as the store's employees. That Despentes created this scene simply for the cinematic presentation of the text supports my claim that its abject brutality, as well as the victimization of members in the throes of passion, serve as a direct message to the audience that sex and death are bedfellows. My conclusion departs from the homocentric critique of the film's final scene of carnage made by Bérénice Reynaud, who wonders: "Could it be that shooting the bad pervert in the ass is an act of covert homophobia?" (2). She conjectures that Despentes removed the murder of the child and replaced with the fatal sodomy of the swinger because a film audience would find that more acceptable. Reynaud weights her criticism of the scene with heavy sarcasm:

> He was obviously of questionable moral values. Which bozo would go to a sex club to get laid? Not us, not us, says the collective voice of the (sexy young) writer and co-directors, of the characters who get either paid (Nadine) or chased (Manu) when they get screwed but never never never have to go to a special place to find it, of the (real) porn starts (Bach and Anderson) playing the main roles

> (who also get paid to do it), *and* of the cool audience who go and see an erotic art film but would never be caught dead in a sex club. He was also a racist, and a woman-hater. What else? A homosexual, maybe? (2)

But Reynaud avoids the central trigger of self-loathing in the man's comment: "On n'est pas à la mosquée" (*Baise-moi*). Despentes and Trinh do not bring issues of race and ethnicity into the forefront of the film's political landscape, but they do indirectly suggest, in the film's earliest scenes, that Manu's abusive relationship to her brother relates to their status as *beurs* in the *banlieue*. In this way, the swinger's criticism reminds Manu of her brother's abuse, and his unwanted advances recall her history of sexual violence.

4.4.7 Nadine Loses Her Match

The risk of death, always part of the pair's abject sexuality and an element predicted by Halperin and by Warner, reinforces the abjection of the women's friendship.

Manu and Nadine have long wondered how their crime spree would ultimately end, imagining possibilities for suicide:

> MANU: J'ai un peu réfléchi à tout sauter dans le vide, et de brûler vive. Mais s'immoler c'est un peu trop prétentieux…j'y vais pour le saut sans élastique. Attends, c'est un miracle qu'on soit encore en circulation. J'aimerais bien finir tout ça aussi bien que ça a commencé.
>
> NADINE: Il faut me pousser dans le vide. Je ne crois pas que j'aurai le courage.
>
> MANU: Ne t'inquiète pas, je te pousserai, moi.

This dialogue reveals not just their understanding of death's certainty, but also of their investment in death claiming both of them at once. When Manu says that she wishes to "bien finir tout ça aussi bien que ça a commencé," she indicates that she wants to die with her partner

in crime, rather than alone. Nadine also acknowledges that she cannot fear the loneliness of suicide by telling Manu to push her. Their conversation marks the burden of loss that accompanies their abject sexuality. Lisa Downing observes that, "[t]heir deaths must not be merely deaths, but endings that are 'cool' enough to be equal to their roles as Tarantino-esque killer chicks […] These characters *have to* live up to their designation as literal *femmes fatales*" (55). Downing's argument that their discussion of suicide contributes to the audience-oriented construction of *femmes fatales* falls short of really interrogating the power of that expression. Manu and Nadine are *femmes fatales* because their own deadliness undoes them; their danger to others becomes a danger to themselves. In Manu's case, the developing self-acceptance of her status as *femme* motorized the abject violence that endangers them. Additionally, the fatal monster of abject sex is never far away; Manu's death fulfills the risk that their crime spree always predicted. But the couple never chooses the circumstances of their loss. A gas station clerk, likely having recognized her from the widely circulated sketches of her face in the news, shoots Manu. Sobbing, Nadine in turn murders the clerk.

Manu dies alone, and Nadine, who has expressed fear regarding suicide, must make decisions about ending her own life, as well. Before burning Manu's body by a lake in the mountains, she kisses her friend on the lips, finally consummating the attraction that has remained unachieved despite their abject desires. The scene fades to a few seconds of black, and the audience hears only Manu's prophecy from the preliminary states of their crime spree: "Je propose qu'on reste ensemble d'ici là." The dreaded *là* has arrived, and the couple is no longer together. Haunted by vivid memories of Manu's joyful and sexy dancing during their second night together, Nadine confirms her fear of suicide by struggling to pull the trigger of the gun she has pressed to her temple. Her failure to kill herself reveals the second the couple's loss; police

officers capture her before she can commit suicide, and the film ends before Nadine can fulfill the commitment she made Manu.[46] Confirmation that the indulgent splurge in abject criminality, violence, sexuality and murder boils down to Manu's own journey toward subjectivity comes as the final scene fades to black, a police officer demanding that Nadine answer, "Elle est où, ta copine? Elle est où, ta salope de copine?".

Though the Manu and the Nadine that appear at the end of the cinematic *Baise-moi* cannot truly be likened to the Manu and the Nadine from the end of the textual *Baise-moi*, as the differences in the two works are enough that the characters' final subjectivities must be at least slightly different, I nevertheless find value in Nicole Fayard's reading of the final scenes of the novel. Fayard understands their loss as a punishment:

> Manu and Nadine are punished for crossing boundaries and questioning the world order. In their determination not to give in to the law of the Father, Manu and Nadine had meticulously planned their suicide. But the novel denies them, unlike Thelma and Louise, this final gesture of self-determination […] Whilst their rebellion functions as a celebration of risk-taking and aggression by women, it also represents a male victory over the threat of castration, an assertion of dominance, control and invulnerability.[47] (68)

My project is not to examine the various feminist resistances of either the film or the novel, but Fayard's Halperinian observation correctly identifies the loss as one that results directly from the women's risk-taking, celebratory or not. Like Sophie, we will not know what becomes of

[46] Karen Lancaume's personal narrative also has a tragic ending. She committed suicide in Paris in 2005.
[47] Here, Fayard compares *Baise-moi* to Ridley Scott's 1991 film *Thelma and Louise*, in which two women embark on a crime spree that ultimately ends with their suicide.

Nadine, but for both characters, their experience of a permanent and irreversible separation from their partners represents another kind of death.

4.5 SELF-LOATHING INCARNATE: *HAUTE TENSION*

Differently than *La Cérémonie* and *Baise-moi*, Alexandre Aja's 2003 slasher film *Haute Tension* follows the friendship of two women, Marie and Alex, whose connection is decidedly more one-sided.[48] Unlike Jeanne and Sophie, and Nadine and Manu, an appetite for abject sex and violence does not fuel their friendship. Rather, Marie falls in love with Alex, and her sexual obsession with her friend manifests as the vicious murder of Alex's family, and the terrorizing of Alex herself. Marie buries her self-loathing for her lesbianism so deep that she does not recognize her violence for what it is—the expression of her unrequited desire for Alex—and she believes that she watches, from a third-person perspective, as the attacks occur at the hands of an anonymous, male serial killer. My argument here thus traces Marie's deep-secreted desire for her friend, to the crux of her psychological split from Alex's friend into the man she envisions as the murderer, to the ultimate and failed reconciliation of these parts of her psyche. However, differently than Sophie and Manu, Marie's journey toward self-knowledge is positive only in that her violent attacks on Alex and Alex's family result in her coming out, resulting in a cruel and painful acknowledgement of her lesbianism. She must, however, use violence as a means of allegorizing an intercourse that Alex's disinterest will never let her realize.

Through these moments of Marie's brutality, it becomes clear that what *Haute Tension* lacks in abject sexuality, the film makes up for in graphic violence. Her crimes reinforce the

[48] Belgian actress Céline de France portrays Marie, and French actress Maiwenn takes on the role of Alex.

idea that because Marie's desire for her friend cannot materialize as sex or romance, she must reduce it to cruelty to win Alex's attention. Marie's loss of her friend equals the permanency of Jeanne's and Manu's death, despite losing Alex to her own madness.

Marie's institutionalization for her madness, in fact, serves as the film's opening scene. Before even showing us Marie herself, we hear her whispering repeatedly, "Je ne laisserai plus jamais personne entre nous" over and over again. Though she speaks to herself, she intends the declaration for Alex, seemingly unable to recognize that the *personne* that has interrupted their friendship is, in fact, herself. Seated in a hospital gown in an exam room, with surgical-grade staples straining to hold together massive gashes to her skin, she anxiously rubs her feet together as a video camera comes on, confirming the panopticonian relationship of the patient to the institute: "Ça y est. Ça enregistre." The camera suggests that Marie was caught not only for her violent assault on Alex and her family, but also for her transgressive physical desires, which will be monitored from now on.

The following scene represents a change in chronology and in reality, depicting Marie's memory of a dream. It depicts a nightmare, hazy and soundless except for Marie's heavy breathing. Covered with blood that oozes from multiple wounds, she limps through the woods. She struggles to escape something or someone. The angle of the camera is flush with Marie's back, giving the impression that we share the perspective of the monster that pursues her, though its identity remains unknown. Soft, lilting music, the kind intended to render its audience uneasy, gets increasingly louder. Stopping a motorist on a deserted country highway, Marie bangs frantically on his driver's side window: "Aidez-moi!"

Before the driver responds, Marie awakens, having napped in the backseat of Alex's car as they travel toward her family's remote country home. She tells her friend of the nightmare:

MARIE: Je viens de faire un rêve super bizarre. J'étais dans une forêt, en train de courir à pied nu. J'étais blessée et je crois que quelqu'un poursuivait. Le plus que je courais, le plus que je sentais qu'il se rapprochait.

ALEX: C'était qui ce mec derrière toi?

MARIE: Ce n'était pas un mec. Je crois que c'était moi, comme si je me courais après.

ALEX: Tu ne peux pas faire des rêves normaux, comme tout le monde?

MARIE: Non. De toute façon, je n'ai pas envie d'être comme tout le monde.

This initial dialogue in fact structures the format of the events to come. First, it nods toward the violent avatar that Marie will use to represent her in the attack on Alex and her family. Alex wonders about the identity of the "mec" following Marie in her dream, predicting the form that her abject desire will assume. Second, Marie's description of the dream, and the dream itself, foreshadow her final pursuit of a bloody and terrified Alex through the woods in several of the film's final shots. Almost identical in camera angle and in content, Alex even stops the motorist for help just as the dreaming Marie does. Finally, the dialogue points at Marie's queerness; Alex identifies something not normal about Marie, who quickly confirms that she does not want to conform "comme tout le monde." She even dreams beyond the realm of normativity, positioning her fantasies out of dominant heteronormative practices, but not beyond the reach of heteronormative reproach. Though it would seem that Marie begins the film with self-assurance, her desires for Alex quickly become the source of self-loathing, as demonstrated throughout a series of scenes that reinforce her friend's non-interest in a same-sex relationship. Nothing yet indicates homosexuality, though Delabre and Roth-Bettoni find that Marie's appearance is intentionally structured to do just that: "Rien n'est explicitement dit concernant

l'homosexualité de Marie, mais tous les signes sont là: un look lesbien typique avec sa coupe à la garçonne, sa bague au pouce et son bracelet de force" (145). The first signals toward Marie's same-sex attraction arrive, in fact, as the conversation develops toward a begrudging acknowledge of Alex's heterosexuality.

First, Alex's refusal to let Marie drive denies her a sense of utility and prizes heteronormativity over her friend's queerness. Marie's complaints are met by Alex's reinforcement of her enthusiastic heterosexuality when she tells Marie she cannot drive because she has a history of dangerous driving:

> MARIE: C'est ta faute; si tu ne m'as pas plantée au milieu de la soirée pour disparaître pendant trois heures. J'espère que ça valait le coup, au moins.
>
> ALEX: Oui. Super coup, même.
>
> MARIE: Espèce de salope.
>
> ALEX: Peste.
>
> MARIE: Connasse.
>
> ALEX: Pétasse.
>
> MARIE: Pouffiasse.
>
> ALEX: Grosse pute.

Her cheerful demeanor clarifies that Alex is being playful with her friend, but Marie, wounded at being left behind so that Alex could have sex with a man, is sincere in her insults toward Alex. Her body language—pushing herself away from Alex, sulking sullenly in the back seat, and avoiding eye contact by staring out the window—confirms that Marie's feelings for her friend cause her pain and self-disgust.

The music that Alex plays coaxes Marie out of her pout, and she finally joins her friend in the front of the car. The presence of Ricchi e Poveri's "Sarà perché ti amo" in the scene symbolizes Marie's love for Alex, and she sings along with enthusiasm, occasionally glancing at over at her: "C'è confusione./Sarà perchè ti amo/è un'emozione/che cresce piano piano/stringimi forte/e stammi più vicino./Se ci sto bene/sarà perchè ti amo" (Ricchi e Poveri). The song's Italian lyrics, however, serve to reinforce Marie's queerness—she sings of her love to Alex but the meaning is not legible—and her desire goes unnoticed. The song's lyrics identify the conflicting *confusione* that Marie senses regarding her friendship with Alex, "stringimi forte/e stammi più vicino" expressing a desire for a physical relationship with the woman. Further, her energy for singing does not diminish, but she stumbles over the lyrics, indicating that even covertly sharing her feelings causes her insecurity.

Indeed, nearly every song of the film's melancholy soundtrack reflects Marie's unexpressed desire for Alex. As the setting of the film transitions from day to night and the couple continues their road trip, a love song again plays as the predominant sound of the scene, clearly serving as yet another of her depressed expressions of desire: "Though I can't see you face to face/Someday, I'll be with you, I know/I believe" (Nickoley). Marie gazes affectionately at Alex and flirtatiously points out, "Tu as encore des paillettes autour des yeux," though the background music transmits the real message she wishes to send. As *Haute Tension*'s initial intended audience is French-speaking, the English lyrics continue to render illegible Marie's desire, hiding it behind foreign lyrics.

4.5.1 The Monster Emerges

Once again, queer shame becomes queer and abjective sex. Marie's stifled desire begins to activate as abject violence in the form the killer who will terrorize Alex and her family, represented by a menacing glimpse of the killer who seemingly stalks the family. The shot of Marie, joyful but smothering her desires nevertheless, and Alex singing in the car cuts to a tranquil view of the family's quiet life on the farm. But parked nearby, the killer, behind the wheel of his dilapidated van, masturbates with the decapitated head of a woman. Sounds of Alex's young brother playing outside drifting through his open window indicate his nearness to the family. The head bears great resemblance to Alex, with pale skin, wide eyes, and the man's proximity to the family home predicts not only that Alex represents the ultimate focus of his sexual cruelty, but that his lust endangers the family, as well.

Returning to Warner's text, the inspiration for Halperin's theories regarding risky and abject sex, the figure of the monster assumes a central role as he tries to explain the power of his unsafe sex:

> When I talked to my friends about the episode, I mentioned only how explosive the sex had been; not that it was unsafe. I recoiled so much from what I had done that it seemed to be not my choice at all. A mystery, I thought. A monster did it.
>
> The next time I saw the same man, we went back to his apartment again. I thought to myself to take precautions, but I could tell by the heady thrill that my monster was in charge. (Halperin 157)

In this case, Marie's monster is in charge. The murderer starts his van and drives away from the decapitated head, indicating that he no longer represents a frustration that Marie can continue to choke. Though there exists no direct parallel of the risk of HIV infection in Marie's life, she

risks both her friendship and the socially accepted status of a heterosexual woman by confessing her desires to Alex. Returning to Halperin's observation that "[by] putting yourself at risk, you interrupt the normal course of your life, resist its established order of meaning, and thereby perform an immanent critique of its priorities. Risk is a tactic for testing which of your values ultimately count" (47), we understand that, in fact, Marie's ultimate risk is just this very interruption of the normal progress of her life and her friendship with Alex. Unable to cognitively and knowingly invest in the risk, she invents this monster in order to both punish her friend for not returning this desire, but also because abject violence must replace the sexuality she and Alex will never share. Indeed, her brutality not only replaces the intercourse that Alex denies her, but it also denies the normative pleasure of seeing their intercourse on screen. Marie cannot rape Alex, so she tries to murder her instead.

That the monster appears as a much older male also points to Marie's fractured sense of self. Tony Magistrale writes that:

> the male monster in the slasher film is never interested in his own sexuality per se—arousal serves only to stimulate his compulsion to assault the object of his lust rather than bond with her. Although he wishes passionately to penetrate female flesh, his efforts are not about procuring pleasure or release for either himself or his victim. The slasher film emphasizes the open wound of the broken body. (148)

The avatar of the monster is then, for Marie, an instrument of metaphor. As Marie, she has bonded with Alex, but as the monster, she can assault her. The "open wound of the broken body" caused by the monster's violence in the flesh his victims therefore reflects the open wound

of Marie's broken self-image. As the monster, she has power; it takes far more to wound her in this form than it does as Marie, who stings from Alex's rejection.

Barry Keith Grant, reading Robin Wood's assertion that "normality is threatened by the monster," especially in relationship to the Other, also identifies that horror films rely upon the image of a marginalized Other in order to argue with a normative and dominant body of thought (Wood 75). Grant correctly observes that:

> [b]roadly speaking, conservative films endorse the ideological status quo as normal and literally demonize deviations from the norm as monstrous; by contrast, progressive examples of the genre challenge these values, either by making the monster sympathetic or by showing normal society to be in some way monstrous in itself, problematizing any easy distinction between normal and monstrous. (284)

Marie's monster fights her battles, both in love and murder, on her behalf as a representative of her queerness. But as this dissertation has gone some distance to demonstrate, heterosexuality is not the enemy in a system of heteronormative standards. Grant's claim that heterosexuality is Marie's enemy does not take into consideration her own self-victimization; the pain she inflicts is not just on Alex and her family, but on herself as well. He writes that

> [t]he film's sadistic killer is depicted visually as representing a generalized masculinity […] and is indicative of the film's critique of masculine heterosexuality. The climactic revelation that it is actually a female protagonist, Marie, who is also the psychotic murderer who imagines herself as a male killer […] offers a profound contemplation of the crushing extent to which women are

the victims of phallic masculinity, their very imaginations and desires colonized. (284)

Grant's model cannot account for Marie's decidedly non-colonized imaginations with respect to the abject violence she requires in order to seduce Alex; in fact, her imaginings of murder are quite well realized. He is, however, absolutely correct when he pinpoints Marie's fear of perversity as a characterization of her self-loathing: "Repressing her "perverse" desire, Marie disavows it by recasting it in the vilest, most aggressive masculine form she can imagine" (290). She chooses a figure whose inner abjection is outwardly visible, contrasting with the secrecy of her shame.

4.5.2 Alex's Heterosexuality

In fact, Alex's heterosexuality is not Marie's enemy, but rather a major source of her self-shame. As in the cases of Sophie and Manu, an abject sense of ashamedness sets the wheels of Marie's abjective attraction in motion. Her references to men and to heterosexual sex only further fan the flames of Marie's intense insecurity. After the scene in the car, Alex is understood to be a sexually active young woman with a sexual interest in men. Once the pair arrives at her family's home, we learn that she also has an emotional and romantic interest in heterosexuality, proving to be a source of pain and of self-hatred for Marie:

ALEX: En même temps, il a une copine et il n'a pas l'air de vouloir la quitter.

MARIE: Pourquoi tu t'archarnes sur lui?

ALEX: Un mec pris, c'est qu'il est forcément bien.

As in the car, Marie maintains a physical distance from Alex as she discusses her attraction to this man, demonstrating her sadness that even a man with a girlfriend represents to Alex a more

viable relationship choice. For Marie, Alex prizes heterosexuality no matter its complicity. When Alex brings the conversation around to Marie's single status, she once again turns to insults to cover her shame, for she is single not only because she is disinterested in men, but also because she cannot be with Alex.

ALEX: Et toi, Marie, quand est-ce que tu décides à franchir le pas?

MARIE: Lâche-moi avec ça.

ALEX: Tu vas finir une vieille fille.

MARIE: Moi, je n'ai pas le faux-cul.

ALEX: Tu as la trouille, surtout.

In her final retort, Alex strikes close to the heart of just why it is that Marie has not yet wanted to "franchir le pas." Marie has multiple fears regarding her same-sex desire: not only the non-normative disruptions of accepting her lesbianism, but also of Alex's likely failure to return her feelings. Accusing Alex of hypocrisy in fact distances Marie from her own inauthentic sense of self while expressing her wishful thinking; she wishes that Alex's heterosexuality were false.

4.5.3 The Abject Avatar

Alex's direct questioning fills Marie with shame, and the scenes that follow motorize the abject brutality, inspired by her insecurities, that awaits. Frustrated, she leaves the house, sitting alone in the yard while perceiving Alex's naked body through an open window. Aroused by the sight of the source of both her desire and her self-loathing, she returns to the guest bedroom and masturbates, presumably fantasizing about Alex. As she approaches orgasm, the film transitions between shots of her masturbation, the sleeping family, and the arrival of Marie's abject avatar, who barrels through the peaceful countryside toward the home in his van, foreshadowing the

interconnectedness of the family, Marie's abject desires, and their violent manifestation. Once again, the background music reveals more of Marie's self-hatred. The music, playing loud through her headphones, contains a sense of self-deprecation, as if she relies on such feelings of self-hatred to enhance the experience of pleasure: "Just another girl./That's what you are./You are just another girl./Maybe nice, but you're not that smart./I love you, and remember, you're just another girl" (U. Roy).

Once again, the lyrics are largely incomprehensible to a French-speaking audience and signal Marie's queer and secret self-loathing, but the secret cannot be kept for much longer. Marie orgasms just as the murderer arrives at the home, suggesting that the combination of her self-loathing and her lust for Alex commences its final stages of solidification. She must commit terrible violence in order to take what Alex will never give her.

Concealed in his truck while he masturbated with the decapitated head, viewers only now gain a true glimpse of the monster, though his facial features remain difficult to discern. In some ways, his humanity is challenged. He initially appears to be much larger than the average man, casting him as in- or as extra-human. He is also inexplicably dirty, even for a man created by Aja to be intentionally blue-collar and masculine. As Grant suggests:

> the killer is over-determined as representing a generalized, phallic, working-class 'maleness': he wears an oily worker's cap and overalls, the company's logo lacking specificity since it is partly obscured by wear and dirt; there is grime under hisfingernails; and his face, repulsively sweaty, is almost always obscured by his cap, by back-lighting, or by the framing of the camera. (Grant 290)

His filth appears to be his most distinguishing characteristic, because nothing is distinct about his dress and he never speaks. The abject filth that Marie feels within rises to the surface of the monster's skin.

4.5.4 The Family as Foe

Before the mayhem begins, Marie shares with Alex her appreciation to her for bringing her home to meet her family: "Alex, ça me fait plaisir de pouvoir rencontrer ta famille" (*Haute Tension*). But, as in the case of the Lelièvres and their murder at the hands of Jeanne and Sophie, the family unit in *Haute Tension* represents an institution of heteronormativity that both oppresses Marie's burgeoning same-sex desire and restricts her access to Alex. According to Tony Magistrale, the presence of Alex's family in the film serves as a mechanism to give the audience the comfort of a normative institution: "The horror tale is compelled to return to the themes of the terrorized family because it establishes a condition with which the audience can readily identify. We want a mother and her endangered child to overcome the enormity of evil operating against them" (123). But, of course, the audience does not yet recognize that Marie slaughters the family by proxy of her murderous avatar, as she appears to be a third-person observer to the attacks. Thus, from their perspective, when the intruder systematically and very violently executes Alex's mother, father, and young brother, Marie is understood to be a helpless bystander, suggesting that her own same-sex desires victimize her, as well.

Magistrale also indicates that unstable family units portrayed in the horror film genre bear a special impact on gender: "Whenever the stability of the family is threatened or rendered dysfunctional in horror art, individual members of the family unit itself frequently display a gender ambiguity that is reflective of and generated by disruptions to the unit" (123). Marie

gives no indication that this is the case with her own family, but according to Magistrale, this accounts for what she perceives as Alex's stubborn heterosexuality and the source of her inability to return Marie's affections. It is no surprise, then, that the avatar makes very certain that Alex's family is quite dead before he loads her into the back of his van and kidnaps her.

4.5.5 Queerness Legible but Non-locatable

Abjection as queerness is not the only manifestation of queerness in the film; illegible desire, first glimpsed in the foreign lyrics of the soundtrack, resurfaces during one of Marie's attempts to save Alex. Most of the scenes in *Haute Tension* contain little to no dialogue, especially those in the center of the story during which the killer has kidnapped Alex and Marie works frantically to secure her friend's release, still believing that she observes the situation and not yet realizing that she is the one to torment Alex. Of special importance among these scenes the first to depict Alex's capture as well as Marie's call for help from a gas station; her queerness first surfaces briefly, but then once again slips beyond Marie's ability to articulate it.

Trying to calm her bound and gagged friend, Marie reassures her that she is lucky to be alive: "S'il avait voulu te tuer, il l'aurait déjà fait." Here, Marie reveals an innate understanding that the avatar keeps Alex live for a reason without immediately comprehending that if he does not kill her, it is so that Marie can eventually frighten her friend into falling in love with her. Unable to have received the woman's affections organically, she subconsciously uses both abject fear to coerce Alex's love, and false heroism to inspire it. Before the killer drives away, Marie hides in the shadows of its interior, believing that she attempts to free Alex, as if to suggest that if terrifying her friend will not work, perhaps saving her will. But despite this misplaced bravery, Marie's self-loathing continues to plague her. Butcher knife in hand, she tries and fails

to kill the assassin, understanding on some level a need to quash her self-hatred by killing herself.

Her entrapment in the van with Alex signifies that the two women exist inside Marie's profoundly internalized fantasy; the avatar realizes the violence that Marie has carried with her in her mind for so long. Both women are victimized by Marie's monster; Alex terrorized by her best friend and Marie unaware that her desires have assumed so much control. Marie is still posited as Alex's hero, but the music in the background exposes her inner torment. The murderer plays Didier Barbelivien's and Félix Gray's song "À Toutes les filles" as he drives away with Marie's captive:

> À toutes les filles que j'ai aimées avant
> Qui sont devenues femmes maintenant
> À leur volcan de larmes
> À leur torrent de charme
> Je suis resté adolescent
>
> À toutes les filles que j'ai aimées avant
> Des cours de lycée en jardin d'enfants
> Aux lettres déchirées
> À leurs baisers volés
> Je suis resté adolescent

The song, this time in French and no longer illegible, speaks most overtly of Marie's covert desires, not just for Alex, but for all the women for whom she has experienced affection and attraction. The lyrics therefore "out" Marie's long history with same-sex desire—she has been in

love with many women—and suggests that part of her abject attraction to Alex results from other, prior rejections. The song itself references the abject side of love by mentioning the abject emotions of anger ("aux lettres déchirées") and sexual violence ("leurs baisers volés"), ultimately signaling Marie's queerness by positioning her as the static and liminal *adolescent*.

Meanwhile, Marie works, or more accurately, the audience mistakenly believes that Marie works, tirelessly to free themselves from the back of the killer's van. Alex makes a point of noting additional evidence that Marie's desires for other women are the deep-seated source of a violent fantasy that she finally activates, pointedly staring at the ceiling of the vehicle, where bloody fingerprints abound. Marie unwittingly confirms this evidence that her imaginary sex life has included other female victims: "Elles étaient seules. Nous, on est deux." Here, "Nous, on est deux" reiterates that this time, the fantasy has become reality, and Marie is no longer alone in her imaginings.

Marie's psychological solitude is partially to blame for her self-loathing, and having failed to kill herself/the avatar with the butcher knife, she attempts once more to self-sabotage by dialing 17 from the telephone of a gas station. Her frantic dialogue with the policeman points to her queerness, an illegible position on a map of normativity that Marie herself struggles to identify:

> LE CAPITAINE GENDARMERIE: Vous êtes dans une station de service? Laquelle?
>
> MARIE: Attendez. Je cherche.

But search as she may, she can come up with no location for the gas station, a failure that gestures not only toward her queerness, but also toward the very conflicting feelings she experiences toward Alex of desire, hatred, fear and pleasure. The more the police operator

presses her, the more Marie insists that she does not know more than she has already shared, blaming her lack of information on being inside the truck: "J'étais à l'intérieur. Je vous le dit. Je n'ai pas pu voir." Her abject desires and intentions remain deeply internalized, and just as she cannot tell the policeman her location, she cannot name the desires that manifest with the assassin that represents her lust.

4.5.6 Marie Meets her Avatar

Chasing her monster and her friend into the woods, Marie finally meets the avatar face-to-face, bring both her abject self-shame and her abject and violent desires front and center. Her self-loathing reaches a true crescendo as she and the executioner brutally injure one and other, each attempting murder. She hates herself for torturing Alex and for killing her family, and she hates herself for trying to interrupt the progress made by kidnapping and isolating Alex. Supine on the forest floor, Marie stares up at him as he moves his fingers in and out of her mouth, symbolically putting words in her mouth in response to his questions: "Qu'est-ce que tu lui veux Alex? Elle t'excite? Moi, aussi, elle m'excite." Marie, now speaking to herself via this communication with the avatar, acknowledges via the avatar for the first time in the film her erotic attraction to Alex. This moment arises at a critical juncture in the film: Alex, still captive, must either die at the hands of Marie's avatar or be saved by Marie. Marie thus undergoes a powerful inner conflict, represented by the vicious physical battle that ensues between her and the monster, in order to determine whether monster wins and Alex dies, or whether Marie wins and liberates her friend.

Beating her avatar over the head until she incapacitates him, Marie temporarily wins this battle. She now turns her attentions to unchaining Alex, coaxing her friend into loving her by

saving her from the atrocities that she has perpetuated: "C'est moi. C'est moi, Marie. Je suis ton amie. Je suis avec toi. Je l'ai tué, Alex. C'est fini. Il est mort." Alex's response surpasses her previous disinterest in Marie, and she stabs the woman in the face and the abdomen. Insulted and taken aback, Marie begins to vacillate between her true state and that of the monster. Now in the form of the assassin again, she chases Alex further into the forest with a motorized round saw: "Tu ne pourrais pas m'échapper, salope! Je vais m'occuper de toi, Alex!" The latter threat viewers hear in two different voice's—Marie's and the monster's. She has returned to her original plan to force her friend, through abject terror, into being her lover. His hat removed, these scenes offer the best glimpses of the monster's face. The audience may recognize Philippe Nahon of Gaspar Noé's 1998 *Seul contre tous*, where he portrayed a violent racist bent on committing incest with his daughter, now portraying Aja's killer, bringing full-circle the notion that Marie's monstrous avatar is, indeed, the very paradigm of disgruntled, blue-collar, masculine discontent. In either form, either as the murderer or as herself, there is little that Marie could ever do to make herself a viable partner for Alex; desperate violence remains her only means of "seduction."

As Alex runs, viewers may remember this scene, as it recreates the chase from Marie's dream in the opening scene of the film, proving that the abject fantasy to attack Alex and murder her family has always been latent in Marie's thoughts. Now fully in the form of the monster, she corners Alex and menaces her with the saw in order to compel Alex to confess to returning her lesbian desires: "Tu rends une femme folle, la petite pute. Tu m'aimes? Tu ne m'aimes pas. Tu ne m'aimes pas, eh?" (*Haute Tension*). Alex screams back, "Si! Je t'aime! Si! Je t'aime!" The background music is coupled with the sound of a great exhale, indicating that Marie feels deeply relieved that Alex finally returns her desire, and in her female state, she leans in to kiss Alex.

The two women are covered in blood and Alex, sobbing, stabs Marie once again, a maneuver that marks their kiss with queer abjection and defies the normative voyeurism of the scopophilic male gaze that prizes the erotic affections of two women.

4.6 CONCLUSION

The final scene of the film reinforces Mulvey's claim that cinema utilizes the figure of the woman to direct the predominantly male gaze, as Marie suddenly returns the gaze and appears to return the stares of those looking at her. Though viewers never see exactly how Marie ends up in an institution, in the last seconds of the film, she sits in a hospital room, covered in scars. Hospital staff can observe her through a one-way portal; a window for them, a mirror for her. Alex, sharing the line of sight of the camera, stares through the window, and her anxious question, "Vous êtes sûr qu'elle ne me voit pas?" is answered by Marie's sudden turn toward her with arms open for embrace. She could not see her friend, but sensed her, her attentions diverted to her presence despite the strategy of the false mirror. The indulgence of scopophilia is denied as Marie sees Alex, and therefore allegorically the camera and its audience, thus challenging the panopticonian function of the one-way mirror.

Scopophilia also serves, then, as a mechanism of the normative panopticon. It measures and observes unilaterally, the objects of its attentions unable to reverse the gaze and measure and observe in return. Marie's ability to spy Alex watching her through the glass and returning her gaze escapes that regulation without explanation, and these final seconds of *Haute Tension* reveal what may be her queerest maneuver of the film.

Since kissing Alex, Marie does not again assume the form of the monster. Grant criticizes her return to her original state from that of the monster as an internalization of heterosexuality: "the hero, who turns out to be the monster, never recognizes her kinship with the monster, never understands the monstrosity of this faceless male killer as her own guilt for being homosexual and for having internalized the values of heterosexuality and patriarchy so fully" (294). But in fact, as we will see in the final shots of the film, though Marie neither admits nor understands her relationship with the murderous avatar, she does overcome the secretive shame she has suppressed and her desire for Alex as they kiss is quite open and unabashed. Even from behind the one-way mirror, she opens her arms to Alex with candid and shameless affection, no longer stifling her same-sex desires and instead displaying a willingness to display them.

If Mulvey and Grant are correct——and I believe that they are—much persuasion lies with the figure of the woman in the cinematic text. In *La Cérémonie*, *Baise-moi* and *Haute Tension*, each of the female protagonists draws our attention not only toward her femaleness, but especially toward the queer Other that her presence represents. Their abject criminality and cruelty draw direct attention to their sexuality, however graphic or subtle, because women and violent crime remain unlikely bedfellows. We still do not understand why men consistently out-perform women in violent crime. To see them do so on-screen may pique a curiosity within viewers who may experience the sense that through the film, they witness something rare and undetermined. The men of Chapter Two, though anti-normative in their queer sexuality, conform to the popular societal expectation that men are, by nature, aggressive. The abject queerness belonging to Jeanne and Sophie, to Manu and Nadine, and to Marie renders these women enigmatic and unique formats by which to study their queerness; the non-normativity of their sexuality relates, in part, to their extra anti-social, anti-feminine actions.

In these films, I examine the relationship of lesbian desire to abject violence through a consideration of standard body morphologies, and of standard homosocial and homosexual attractions, but of erotics with an investment in existing *hors la loi*. Abjection here has meant violence, cruelty, and the defiance of social and public law. The following chapter also introduces us to a queerness showcased by enigmatic and unique women, but these women present a far more complicated relationship with corporeality, sex and abjection: Georges Bataille's *Madame Edwarda* transforms into multiple animal hybrids as her lover chases her through the streets of Paris, and Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes* features an anonymous female narrator whose career as a prostitute flourishes as she turns into a pig. In this final discussion of my project, I use these texts to examine female figures whose bodies defy normative conceptions of womanhood, though their sexual desires remain largely heteronormative. Here, space becomes a question of either concealing or revealing the non-normative queerness of an abject desire that prizes the sexuality of female animality even as it borders on bestiality.

5.0 SPACES, PLACES AND SEX IN BATAILLE'S *MADAME EDWARDA* AND DARRIEUSSECQ'S *TRUISMES*

We know where sex lives. It has an address in red-light districts, in brothels and bath houses, in swingers' clubs and strip joints. We do not have to be searching for sex to understand how to locate it within these spaces, and we are able to sense that it exists not simply among these more obvious scenes, but in subtle ones, as well. More frequently than ever, sex also has a cyber address. On-line pornography can be seen as virtual space for sex, as is true for the multitudes of other websites that are utilized to advertise casual sex or prostitution.

When bodies filter in and through these spaces, either real locations or the sex chat rooms and pornography of the Internet, they leave traces of self-representation and experiences. Their presence is implicit participation in the sex that already happens. These powerful and marked areas of sex thus imprint sex, not simply the act, but most importantly the idea, on the body. And yet, the exchange of power between space and the body complicates their relationship. Bodies often exercise a potency of their own on the areas they inhabit, changing where sex may happen and redefining the ways in which we understand how to locate sex.

The importance of space in abjective sex has special relevance because space either confirms and keeps, or betrays and exposes, the secret of abjection that takes place within it. Space is chosen to showcase or to conceal abjective sex and is the determining component in maintaining the secrecy of acts and desires, or in displaying them and forcing a confrontation with the abject. Understanding the role of space in abjective desire permits us to consider the themes of concealment and exhibition as they relate to the abject, and space determines the

choice of disguising or displaying. Previous chapters have demonstrated the bonds that tie abjection to desire and their relevance in French studies and in gender studies; this chapter will prove the relevance of space in the study of abjection and sex by examining spaces that conceal, confine, exhibit and expose.

This task requires considering space, sex and abjection from many angles. What can we learn about the relationship between space and abjection? And how might desire be put in dialogue within that connection? How can we understand imagined space and its interaction with the very real notions of sex and abjection?

This chapter considers these themes by interrogating the intersections of sex, abjection, space, and the body in two twentieth-century French texts: Georges Bataille's short story *Madame Edwarda*, first published in 1941, and Marie Darrieussecq's much more recent novel *Truismes*, published more than fifty years later. Both texts showcase lust fueled by abjective animality in and around anonymous narrators, just as both texts position prostitution as a challenge to the stability of sexual norms and as a medium of sexual and social upheaval. In *Truismes*, the narrator transforms into a sow, a new corporeality that provokes significant heterosexual male desire, while in *Madame Edwarda*, the narrator's desire for a prostitute stimulates animal-like qualities within her. Each work also utilizes space as much more than a background for abjective sex, but as an equally important literary element that acts as a crucial medium for abjective sex and desire. This chapter should be seen as a lens that first focuses on the imprint of sexualized bodies on the space(s) around them. The lens then re-centers on the reverse analysis of bodies that are altered by their spatial circumstances. The relationship therein is complex, and such a move allows us to consider space, abjection, bodies and sex more acutely.

I position this chapter at the end of the dissertation in order to consider other points of intersectionality that might align with abjection, subjectity and sexuality—namely questions of space and literacy. The chosen texts to showcase these elements as each provides a detailed and theoretically relevant context in which the two sides of this study are put in useful dialogue. The words complement each other and offer contrary but correlated analyses of the relationship between the body and space. *Madame Edwarda* permits an examination of the unique impact of bodies on space, while *Truismes* allows us to consider the transformative properties of space on the body. Taken together, examining these two texts as case studies reveals the importance of space in understandings of sexuality in twentieth-century French literary production.

I begin by examining the positioning of spatiality and abjective sexuality in *Madame Edwarda*. The narrator's vacillation between repulsion and desire forms a barrier between himself and the world around him, isolating him even in non-private settings. The sex that the narrator shares with Madame Edwarda becomes a space itself, embedded within an already formed space. Impacted by this desire, Edwarda figuratively (but increasingly) transitions into an animal, reinforcing that this kind of queer desire, the sexual pursuit of a bestial woman, is something fundamentally beyond the limits of non-alternative human sexuality. Her animality reflexively impacts her lover, and as it expands along with his desire for her, so too does his need to pursue her.

5.1 SEX AS SPACE AND ANIMAL ABJECTION

Although space is not a key theme in Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, her thoughts regarding the "where" of abjective separation, of distancing oneself from the abject, helps us to understand how space is an important tool in understanding abjection at large. In fact, Kristeva concludes

that *where* the deject, s/he "by whom the abject exists" (8), resides can be responsible for new territories and new divisions of space. She explains:

> The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belong, or refusing. Situationist in a sense…wishing to know is abjections is not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations.
>
> Instead of surrounding himself as to his 'being,' he does so concerning his place: '*Where* am I?' instead of '*Who* am I?" For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogenous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines–for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject–constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved. (8)

The dejects and the strays require space in order for abjection to truly form their subjectivity. They are unaware of themselves without the abject, and without the *where* of the abject, subjectivity cannot solidify. The deject will pursue the magnetic abject no matter what, and the space that encases this pursuit is "divisible, foldable, catastrophic," that is to say that this space

can be re-forged, re-cast, or re-drawn in response to the abjection it houses. Neither fitting nor belonging, the stray has a queerness that is inseparable from abjection.

5.2 BATAILLE ON BATAILLE

Madame Edwarda presents both a deject and a stray as its protagonists. Between the two—who is rejected, and who strays—it is impossible to differentiate, because both Edwarda and the narrator are easily both. The filthy, animal-like prostitute and her determined lover may be interchangeable in these roles as we watch fields of abjection, animality and sexuality mobilize them both.

The latter are nascent in Georges Bataille's personal philosophical belief system, one in which abjection and sexuality share much common ground. Their appearance in the text is a natural extension of Bataille's understanding of the tensions that tie sex to life, life to death, and animal life to human life. He was keenly interested in derailing dominant conceptions surrounding power and the body, sex and death being the most compelling powers of all, and thus dedicates his 1957 text *Eroticism* to proving that sex and death are not only connected, but ultimately one and the same.

Bataille begins his arguments by examining biology and animality, insisting first that sex and death are linked through reproduction. Humans, on a cellular level, are discontinuous entities: your death is not mine, for example, despite our shared common molecular landscape. But Bataille claims instead that death actually engenders continuity. According to him, if reproduction is a continuous state of cells begetting new cells, so must also be death:

> [i]t is my intention to suggest that for us, discontinuous beings that we are, death means continuity of being. Reproduction leads to the discontinuity of beings, but brings into play their continuity; that is to say, it is intimately linked with death…death is to be identified with continuity, and both of these concepts are equally fascinating. This fascination is the dominant element in eroticism. (13)

Death, in this case, is the biological byproduct of sex, as individual cells must sacrifice their autonomy in order to join with other cells in the creation of a mammal. He believes that eroticism, in turn, enhances the unavoidable journey toward death by exposing the continuity of lovers: "Erotic activity, by dissolving the separate beings that participate in it, reveals their fundamental continuity, like the waves of a stormy sea. In sacrifice, the victim is divested not only of clothes, but of life" (22).

Quoting Sade, Bataille explains the groundwork that he has laid for his later philosophical assertions in *Eroticism*, claims in which sex repeatedly gives way to death:

> "*There is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image*."
>
> What I have been saying enables us to grasp in those words the unity of the domain of eroticism open to us through a conscious refusal to limit ourselves within our individual personalities. Eroticism opens the way to death. Death opens the way to the denial of our individual lives. Without doing violence to our inner selves, are we able to bear a negation that carries us to the farthest bounds of possibility? (24)

This question insinuates that the violence of sex lies in pushing us ever closer to death, thus opening up further and greater possibilities for both of these terms, reminding of Sedgwick's nonce taxonomy and the queerness she perceives in diversity. If queerness for Bataille, as for

Sedgwick, can be defined by versatility, the real flexibility in his theories of sexuality relates to death. Though sex is not always queer, its inevitable investment death means that in Bataille, its queerness is constant.

Its queerness also stems from Bataille's belief that human sexuality can be reduced to animal sexuality by removing properties of self-reflection and self-awareness. Sexuality is, for him, fundamentally animal, as the key difference between human sexuality and animal sexuality is in a human's ability to intellectualize it:

> The animal itself does have a subjective life but this life seems to be conferred upon it like an inert object, once and for all. Human eroticism differs from animal sexuality precisely in this, that it calls inner life into play. In human consciousness eroticism is that within man which calls his being in question. Animal sexuality does make for disequilibrium and this disequilibrium is a threat to life, but the animal does not know that. Nothing resembling a question takes shape within it? (29)

For Bataille, that his own Edwarda, and eventually Darrieussecq's hybrid narrator, should transform into an animal suggests that their new animal states are thrust upon them in such a way that the women are first robbed of their choice in experiencing overwhelming desire, and secondly of their capacity to understand it. Sexuality is thus queer because it occurs in figures who cannot understand it per social and cultural terms—for these women, it exists without explanation and investment.

It does not surprise that the preface to *Madame Edwarda* is also included as the final, most powerful chapter in *Eroticism*. Bataille's personal and intellectual doctrine illuminates *Madame Edwarda*, reminding us that his political and social commentary are critically imbedded

in the work, despite the short length of the project. Perhaps because *Madame Edwarda* has such personal implications, Bataille permits himself a degree of distance in the story by publishing under the pseudonym Pierre Angélique, allowing the narrator to assume the space of Kristeva's *deject* or *stray*. Using a false name permits Bataille to wander the pages of his own story, as if Angélique represents some discarded part of his personality. He initially encourages readers, despite "Angélique's" serious assertions to the contrary, not to invest themselves fully in the preface, as matters related to sex tend to be taken lightly. Yet the paragraphs that follow repeatedly contradict that notion, and it quickly becomes clear that Bataille invites his readers not to disregard the relationship between sex and death, but to radically reconfigure their perception of eroticism and pain. He writes:

> Un ensemble de conditions nous conduit à nous faire de l'homme (et de l'humanité), une image également éloignée du plaisir extrême et de l'extrême douleur: les interdits les plus communs frappent les uns la vie sexuelle et les autres la mort, si bien que l'une et l'autre ont formé un domaine sacré, qui relève de la religion. (*Madame Edwarda* 6)

Religion and patriarchy monitor both sex and death. In Catholicism, the religious tradition from which Bataille was writing, sex remains a regulated, marital function intended to produce human life. For Catholic Bataille, who once considered becoming a monk, the notion that was sex was absorbed within the Catholic religious rite of marriage would have been inescapable. Likewise, religion regulates death, and religious standards even appropriate the prospect of an afterlife.

Sex automatically and directly connects to death because, as Bataille reminds us in plain biological terms, sex produces life. He insists: "Le plus pénible commença lorsque les interdits touchant les circonstances de la disparition de l'être reçurent seuls un aspect grave et que ceux

qui touchaient les circonstances de l'apparition – toute l'activité génétique – ont été pris à la légère" (6). Death and sex are more than merely connected – they are poles on the same continuum, death being the ultimate manifestation of sex. He summarizes his preface by stressing: "La préface de ce petit livre où l'érotisme est représenté, sans détour, ouvrant sur la conscience d'une déchirure, est pour moi l'occasion d'un appel que je veux pathéthique" (7). The imagery in this quote stresses the inextricability of pain from sex that characterizes *Madame Edwarda*. Sex and eroticism open up, and eventually force confrontation with this *déchirure*; violence and pain are therefore the natural consequences of sex. Bataille's abjection is erotic pleasure because it cannot be experienced without despair that death is imminent.

5.3 FROM THE PREFACE TO THE TEXT

When we read the narrator's desire for Edwarda, then, we predict that death is his desire's only outcome. Lust in this text should not be seen as enhanced or enriched by abjective qualities—Bataille does not position them here gratuitously. Rather, abjection simplifies and naturalizes lust, as the inevitable violence of death regulates sexuality. Death must occur, and so, therefore, must also be preceded by sex. Again, what is abject in Bataille's work—sex engendering and even equaling death—is also what renders it queer.

The narrator even posits death as another guest at the brothel, suggesting that it waits for its turn to engage the prostitutes and their clients: "la mort elle-même était de la fête, en ceci que la nudité du bordel appelle le couteau du boucher" (24). In fact, his whorehouse represents for Bataille a landscape of sexual norms with which Angélique's and Edwarda's queerness is contrasted. Ignoring the brothel's anti-social history as a challenge to marriage and a petri dish

of disease, he sees it instead as a small way of erecting heteronormative edicts—a site of heteronormative sex, for heterosexuals, that make love in normative ways. Doing so means that these can be challenged by heterosexual sex whose anti-sociality is so potent that it defies even the laws of a law-breaking site. And for Bataille, this means that death accompanies Angélique into the brothel.

Indeed, the un-named narrator realizes that death approaches, even in the initial scene of the text. He describes an aroused repulsion at the sight of two prostitutes on a Parisian street, sensing his own decomposition among the sensations of revulsion and arousal: "Au coin d'une rue, l'angoisse, une angoisse sale et grisante, me décomposa (peut-être d'avoir vu deux filles furtives dans l'escalier d'un lavabo). Il me faudrait me mettre nu, ou mettre nues les filles que je convoie: la tiédeur de chairs fades me soulagerait" (21). His "angoisse sale et grisante me décomposa" makes it clear that anguish is killing him, the abject surfacing in his reference to decomposition as the byproduct of desire. The recurring spatial theme of detachment from the public appears for the first time here, and though the narrator is in a public space, his abjective desire is so intimate that a sense of isolation envelopes his sex acts. Associating the women with *le lavabo* complicates the connection — the space is used for the cleansing of the body, and prostitutes have come to do so because they are not clean. Their clients come to dirty them again and again, and they cleanse their bodies in preparation for incoming clients. The narrator's patronage produces the filth the women must wash away in the public bath, the source of abjection. Indeed, the *lavabo* here refers not to a sink but to a public bathroom; that the bathroom is accessible by stairs, away from the street, complicates the space as neither fully private nor public. The separation of the narrator's body and the bodies of the prostitutes from the communal space that surrounds them is reinforced.

Furthermore, in French, the expression *avoir lieu* is synonymous with "to occur," suggesting that enacted events truly "have/take place" by owning the space where they occur, despite what may be going on around them.

In this spatial insulation, the narrator explains that his attraction to these women does not exist independently from the decomposition that supplements his arousal for them thus insisting that abjection and desire are natural bedfellows. He fills with *angoisse* because he sees his death in these women. Bataille's use of *décomposer* links the psychological torment of the narrator with the decay. Lust does not simply appall him; it murders him. Associating the women with *le lavabo* complicates the connection—the space is used for the cleansing of the body, and prostitutes have come to do so because they are not clean. Their clients come to dirty them again and again, and they cleanse their bodies in preparation for incoming clients. The separation of the narrator's body and the bodies of the prostitutes from the communal space that surrounds them is reinforced. His patronage produces the filth the women must wash away.

The more the narrator experiences disgust, the more demanding his urges become. Bataille envisions sex and death as the same force, so the narrator has little choice but to succumb to the desire for decay. On the street, he exposes his penis and his legs, further erecting the imagery of a public scene that melts into the background and reveals an abjective barrier, and sequestering him from his public surroundings and sexualizing the street: "La nuit était nue dans des rues désertes et je voulus me dénuder comme elles: je retirai mon pantalon que je mis sur mon bras; j'aurais voulu lier la fraîcheur de la nuit dans mes jambes, une étourdissante liberté me portait. Je me sentis grandi. Je tenais dans la main mon sexe droit" (21). On the street, he exposes his penis, further erecting the imagery of a public scene that melts into the background and reveals an abjective barrier, and sequestering him from his public surroundings. Draping his

pants over his arm ostensibly shields his penis, but a man on the street wearing no pants is cause for attention. That the narrator receives no special attention suggests hints that the prostitutes he approaches do not notice, or perhaps expect him to arrive that way because of their own nudity.

The semi-nude presence of the narrator, his desire, and most importantly, his erection, now sexualize the street. The erection projects this sexuality, one fostered by desire for death, onto the street. It is not important that the streets are deserted; the emergence of the erection designates the public quality of the street as private and newly sexual. The *étourdissante liberté* generated by the narrator's removal of his pants predicts the sexual liberties he will enjoy with Edwarda. His penis ("Je tenais dans la main mon sexe droit") portrays the abjective compass in this scene, directing the narrator toward the brothel, toward sex, and toward his death.

Though abjection, and the abjective qualities of the prostitutes, activate the narrator's draw to them, Bataille himself believed that prostitutes were liberated from the taboos surrounding abjection. The abject poverty that frequently motivates men and women to work in the sex industry releases them from the socio-cultural obligation to avoid the unmentionable and the unthinkable, and prostitution is consequently a point of focus for his fictional work. In *Eroticism*, he demarcates the special influences that abjection and prostitution hold over one and other. "The rise of low prostitution," Bataille explains, "is apparently connected with the appearance of poverty-stricken classes whose unhappy plight absolved them from the need scrupulously to observe the taboos" (134). Abject want erases the frightening, offensive or repulsive properties of having sex for money, suggesting that these properties give way to a different sort of suffering. Bataille continues:

> People who live side by side with taboos—with the sacred—and accept them in the profane world where they live their struggling lives have nothing animal about

> them, although others may deny that they are human (they are in fact lower than the dignity of animals). The various objects of taboo evoke neither horror nor nausea in them, or too little at any rate. But without feeling them intensely themselves they know what other's people's reactions are.[49] (135)

The prostitute owns both a special immunity to and a unique awareness of abjection; she exists undisturbed by it while accentuating its potency for her partners, her blasé attitude lends itself to the kind of spatial isolation created by the narrator when in the presence of prostitutes. The abjective desire belongs to the narrator, and though it may be provoked by the abjective qualities of the sex worker, he is susceptible to that from which Edwarda remains exempt. The taxi driver, Edwarda's final partner of the story, shares the narrator's desire and becomes the determining factor in their collective deaths.

The narrator's entry into the brothel where he has encountered Madame Edwarda heightens this sense of being alone in a crowd. Though he sees her seated among "un essaim de filles" (22), their immediate abjective lovemaking seems unremarkable to the prostitutes and clients seated around them. Their transition to sex is direct. Even the rooms of a whorehouse have distinct purposes, and the foyer's purpose is for socializing while sex is reserved for the women's individual rooms upstairs. The theoretical purpose of the brothel—to provide heterosexual men a way to purchase sex from a woman—is anti-normative, as it disrupts cultural norms like monogamy and chastity. But in *Madame Edwarda*, the brothel represents, in fact, the

[49] Earlier in *Eroticism*, Bataille explains his understanding of the terms *taboo* and *transgression*. He claims that *taboo*, understood to be the cultural edicts viewed as sacred, is a systematic historicosocial regulation that places violence at the margins of society (he uses "Thou Shalt Not Kill" as his primary example). *Transgression*, as Bataille says, "does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it" (63). He insists that certain taboos are subject to transgression when such transgression is sanctioned by religious or governmental forces (both of which can be seen as imposed patriarchal structures).

normative restraints against which queerness struggles, as it espouses anti-social but nevertheless dominant tropes of heteronormativity and surveillance. Differently than the brothel featured in *Le Balcon*, the whorehouse of *Madame Edwarda* seeks to punish and regulate rather than promote revolution.[50]

Once again, repulsion and sickness characterizes the encounter: "nos deux bouches se mélèrent en un baiser malade. La salle était bondée d'hommes et de femmes et tel fut le désert où le jeu se prolongea" (22). Their kiss is sick, signifying that their passion is an infection. The description of the room itself calls to mind a connection between dirt and arousal: *la salle* evokes a filthy woman (*la sale*) and *bondée* is another indirect image of an erect penis (*bander*). The oxymoron of *bondée*/*desert* reinforces the imagery of isolation in a crowd. Sex itself becomes a space within a space, an embedded compartment of the room, as Edwarda and her lover begin intercourse in a part of the brothel not designated for sex. The spatial allocation of zones for sex and zones for socializing means that social allocation has permeated even this space. The brothel is normative and condones regulated heteronormative behavior. Sex in front of disinterested others redefines the primary use of the space. Non-normative desire has seeped through the cracks of disciplinary regulation by this unabashed exhibition of lovemaking. In one of the most queer and Foucauldian maneuvers of the text, the narrator and Edwarda colonize and re-sexualize a normative area.

In *Madame Edwarda*, the brothel, historically a challenge for heteronormative standards, is normative and condones regulated heterosexual behavior. Sex in front of uninterested others (and it is important that these others are not part of this sex act, either as participants or as voyeurs) redefines the primary use of the space. Their non-normative desire has seeped through

[50] As we shall see later in *Madame Edwarda*, the house madam patrols the brothel's foyer and enforces standard sexual behaviors.

the cracks of disciplinary regulation by this unabashed exhibition of their lovemaking. In one of the queerest maneuvers of the text, the narrator and Edwarda re-sexualize a normative, but already sexualized, area by confirming what is otherwise the only privacy afforded by a brothel. By entering it, other prostitutes and clients assume Angélique and Edwarda will have sex; the couple chooses to resist that assumption by confirming it.

But we should not assume that because the brothel is not a public space, it is not a monitored one. While the brothel as an actual entity has a long history involving anti-normative sex, Bataille's intends his brothel to be deeply saturated heteronormative sexual tradition, but the act of prostitution itself, a woman's decision to earn money in exchange for sex, dismantles the social regulation of the woman.

Nancy Duncan has placed prostitution beyond heteronormativity and claims that it challenges patriarchy, opposing the traditional view that sex workers are its products. She explains that prostitutes

> upset the "everything in its place" mentality that reproduces the public/private spatial dichotomy. They threaten notions of "respectable" and "orderly" behaviour on the part of women who, it is thought, should be escorted at night in public places. Because of women's traditional exclusion from the political sphere, the term "public woman" in dominant discourse has traditionally meant "not respectable," a prostitute […] To be a respectable woman was to sexually serve one man—a husband at home.[51] (139)

[51] Duncan's argument, of course, makes certain assumptions about a woman's agency in prostitution; if queerness lies in empowerment, then agency is a key factor in such queerness. Problems within the greater scope of prostitution—dependency on drugs, underage prostitutes, human slavery and sex trafficking—generate human casualties, rather than agents of queer desire.

Edwarda blurs the boundaries between the public and the private not only because she threatens standardized social applications of the woman, but because she upsets even the more particular " 'everything in its place' mentality" of the brothel by allowing sex with a client to take place in front of others who are neither a passive nor an active part of these sex acts and have not been given a choice in their viewership. And Edwarda's agency in her prostitution, as Bataille's textual figure, can only point to her queerness.[52]

I propose that an action inspired by queer desire constructs new boundaries of space within a space as an advancement of Michel de Certeau's well-known analysis of the urban cityscape. His essential differentiation between *space* and *place* and the ways in which they give meaning to one another.[53] If we understand that *place* signifies a defined and distinct location, even the domain of the brothel follows the "proper rules" recognized by de Certeau. In the sense that we recognize a brothel and what occurs therein, the site has fulfilled its obligation to stability. It exists to facilitate sex, sex happens there, and it does so as a socially decipherable institution. Lawrence Knopp sees the easy identification of a legibly sexualized location as an example that such "codings emphasise both erotic and more functional conceptions of sexuality, depending upon the particular areas and populations involved" (152). The brothel is clearly coded as both a functional and an erotic *place*. *Space*, therefore, fills in the gaps left by *place*,

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[52] Bataille's theoretical conclusions regarding the prostitute and abjection appear in a later part of this chapter.

[53] De Certeau's theories of spaces within spaces are the hallmark of scholarship that examines the tensions between *space* and *place*. He claims:

> A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*). The law of the 'proper' rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. (117)

most notably because it is a site of movement and action.[54] Though his primary example is that of the effect that walking bodies have on a city street, de Certeau's argument relies on the understanding that bodies impact the zones in which they shift. If we perceive that the sex act, especially one as deviant as the abjective sex act, occurs in a place communally determined to be anything else, the mobile elements that are bodies themselves become a space that impacts and redefines their surroundings via their very movements. Consequently, sex in the foyer in front of other employees and patrons cleanly models space as a practiced place; sexual relations become the focal point of the foyer, and here they are executed within it, though they do not follow the "proper rules" of the house.

This blatant use of sex in an area not marked for sex has significance exactly because such areas exist mere feet away, making David Bell's theories of public intimacy significant. "Public (homo)sex," writes Bell, "also runs against many societal constructs of intimacy, with the casual anonymous encounter being thought of as the very antipathy to the romantically charged (and heteronormative) model of sexual love" (306). But although the sex Bell describes is in "public," it does not usually include an audience. Such intercourse may occur in public, but without the voyeuristic component displayed in *Madame Edwarda*. Edwarda and her lover are hardly heteronormative, and despite sharing the foyer with other couples that seek casual and anonymous sex, they have made such a semi-public area their private space. As Jeffrey Weeks

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[54] De Certeau is explicit when explaining what determines *space*:

> A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function […] In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper.'
>
> In short, *space is a practiced place*. (117)

has said, they have "redefined" the space: "Such places break with the conventional distinctions between private and public, making nonsense of our usual demarcations […] Most ostensibly public forms of sex actually involve a 'redefinition of privacy.' " (222). By redefining privacy, they redefine spatial limitations, exposing the queer underpinnings of their heterosexual sex.

The simultaneous climax of the narrator and his lover benefits from this special non-privacy. In plain view of patrons and prostitutes alike, they share an orgasm that denotes pain and danger: "je sentis Madame Edwarda, dont mes mains contenaient les fesses, elle-même en même temps déchirée: et dans ses yeux plus grands, renversés, la terreur, dans sa gorge un long étranglement" (22). She is *déchirée*, ripped apart, ostensibly by the narrator's penetration, undone by abjection and desire in much the same way he described feeling as he spied on the prostitutes in the street. Like him, Edwarda feels blissful *angoisse*, and the awareness that she is *déchirée* illustrates the same destruction that threatens the decomposition of narrator.

The awareness that the two lovers are part of a crowd remains persistently absent. Still seated among fellow prostitutes and their clients, Edwarda, lifting a leg and separating the folds of her labia with her fingers, asks the narrator, "Tu veux voir mes guenilles?" (23). Referring to her labia as rags fans the flames of the abjective chemistry between the two characters, and the narrator peers in for a closer look. Bataille writes about the abject quality of the human sex organs:

> [t]he coarse expressions describing the organs, products or acts of sexing are degrading in the same way. These words are prohibited. There is general taboo upon naming these organs. To name them in a shameless manner is a step from transgression to the indifference that puts the most sacred on the same footing as the profane. (135)

Edwarda's reference to her labia as rags declares her genitals used up and dirty, an exemplification of the contravention of normative language that Bataille claims. Not only has she engaged in the taboo of naming her labia, she has named them per the shameful self-perception that she is unclean and used. Mutual abjective desires compose the chemistry between her genitals and the transfixed narrator: his, to view her dirty body so closely, and hers, to call attention to her self-loathing, so similar to his own. Her self-degradation forms their abjective connection. That such intimacy takes place in front of an audience reinforces the spatial peculiarities of their relationship; Edwarda's exposed labia cannot attract the attention of others the way that they mesmerize the narrator; she has invited only the narrator to inspect her genitals. Alone in their *space*, the members of the *place* surrounding the couple are immune to the abjective desires on display. The abjection of this scene relates not specifically to this oral sex, but in fact to Edwarda's bodily shame: her comments indicate that she derives pleasure from degrading her genitals before her lover.

Her insistence on being as publicly undressed reflects Bataille's own belief that "eroticism is fusion, all barriers gone" (129). Making her repulsive nudity as accessible as possible magnetizes the narrator to Edwarda, sealing the *deject* and the *stray* within their own space. According to Bataille, "[n]akedness as opposed to the normal state is certainly a kind of negation. The naked woman is near the moment of fusion, her nakedness heralds it" (131).[55] They are welded together by her naked body, and most especially by her exposed vagina. That such intimacy occurs in front of an audience reinforces the spatial peculiarities of their relationship; Edwarda's exposed vagina does not impact others the way it mesmerizes the

[55] Bataille continues that it is nakedness that nears the dissolution of barriers, not the woman itself. She remains fossilized in the objectifying powers of patriarchy in which she exists, something that he attempts to dismantle as he posits Edwarda as God.

narrator, though surely her genitals are visible to them. Alone in their *space*, the members of the *place* surrounding the couple are immune to the abjective desires on display.

Cathy MacGregor has also identified the female body as the ultimate abjective figure chez Bataille. Specifically, she has pinpointed the vagina as affecting enough energy to change the course of the story, and she, too, sees this sexuality as inseparable from abjection. She explains:

> [F]or in Bataille, the female body is also primarily a site of abjection where all meanings, particularly those made by masculine subjectivity, are under attack […] The female body in general, and the vagina in particular, become the eye of the deconstructive storm […] The cunt literally becomes the place where meaning is made redundant and into which the male subject disappears. (105)

There can be no doubt that the abjective vagina has special significance in *Madame Edwarda*, though it is uncertain that Pierre Angélique representative of Bataille himself, disappears during the narrative. The vagina, after all, is not what has transfixed him as Edwarda has magnetized him with her outer genitals, her labia. Though the text clearly, as MacGregor has affirmed, "highlight(s) the inadequacies of the meanings with which society invests gender, sexuality and the family" (104), this dismantling of dominant social forces should not be read to mean the dissolution of the male protagonist. Rather than getting lost in the vagina, or becoming absorbed by being in its line of sight, Edwarda's labia further compel him to nurture his desire for the abject. Her outer genitals serve to bring him new awareness and renewed motivation. The narrator's view of her labia forces an understanding that the two are alone in this *space* formed from their desire, and that there can be no return from death. Though others in the room are aware of Edwarda and her lover, the narrator senses that they will not join them on their journey.

Face to face with her genitals, the narrator indulges their insulation from the crowd, but during this oral sex the pair finally acknowledges that they are not alone. Edwarda's insistence that he perform oral sex on her is met with the narrator's trepidation as he slowly remembers that there are others in their midst:

> Mais elle avait maintenu sa position provocante. Elle ordonna:
>
> –Embrasse!
>
> –Mais…, protestai-je, devant les autres? (23)

This sudden cognizance does not underscore the notion of the body's spatial detachment, but rather supports it, implying that what happens to and within the borders of the body is always a private experience despite potential onlookers. The knowledge that they are among a crowd is not enough to permeate the boundaries separating him and his abjective desire from others.

Though the brothel's resident madam eventually ushers the couple into Edwarda's private quarters, the narrator initially becomes aware that they are in a crowded room, the first to realize that their isolation is merely psychological. When Edwarda invites him to perform oral sex on her, he responds confusedly, "[D]evant les autres?" (23). This sudden cognizance does not underscore the notion of the body's spatial detachment, but rather supports it, implying that what happens to and within the borders of the body is always a private experience despite potential onlookers. This importance resurfaces in the citation itself, as the narrator comments that "[d]ans l'absurdité du bordel et dans la confusion qui m'entourait…je restai suspendu étrangement, comme si Edwarda et moi nous étions perdus dans une nuit de vent devant la mer" (23). The question "Devant les autres?" seems to be answered via a *jeu de mots* that reiterates the strength of the barriers of their abjective intimacy. The final two words in this sentence, *la mer*, give the impression that the question "Devant les autres?" has been answered by "Devant,

devant la mère." It is no coincidence, then, that the action immediately following is the arrival of the brothel's madam, a mother of sorts, with her request that Edwarda and her lover leave the common room.[56] Such coded language further isolates the abjective, lustful *place* that the couple has formed. These subversive messages transmitted in standard language are metaphor for the subversive *spaces* present in standard *places*.

Transitioning away from the chaos of the brothel's foyer ends the series of embedded, insulated sexual exchanges. At this moment in the tale, however, another textual theme remains unresolved. We must remember that the narrator's sexual investment in Edwarda cannot separate from his aversion from her; she is consistently legible to him as animal-like, and this animality is never harmless. When Edwarda insists that he carefully inspect her vagina, which she describes as rags, the narrator sees it as an animate and entirely separate being that interacts independently: "Ainsi les 'guenilles' d'Edwarda me regardaient, velues et roses, pleines de vie comme une pieuvre répugnante" (23). He sees neither a vagina nor Edwarda, but an octopus that autonomously reacts to his careful inspection by staring back at him.

And yet his desire for Edwarda translates into a desire to be intimate with this abjective part of her person, and as he performs oral sex on her, he claims that "il me sembla entendre un bruit de houle, on entend le même bruit en appliquant l'oreille à de grandes coquilles" (23). He perceives her thighs to be a conch shell, her vagina the sea snail that resides within. These shells are periodically abandoned by their hosts and re-inhabited by another snail, reinforcing the

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[56] The madam's presence, posited as that of a mother, is far more patriarchal than maternal: "J'entendis une autre voix, venant d'une forte et belle femme, honorablement vêtue: –Mes enfants, prononça la voix hommasse, il faut monter" (23). She, and her request that the couple move their intercourse to a standardized location for sex, should be seen as representative of the regulation and implementation of sociosexual norms. The madam acts as the Foucauldian panopticon of the room, capable not only of enforcing these norms, but also of recognizing and correcting transgressions.

abjective imagery of Edwarda's used and discarded sex. The *space* of Edwarda's body is not adequate, recognizable both to her and to the narrator as dirty. Her attempt to flee from it results not only in the ensuing restless escape into the streets, but finally in the death that Edwarda knows waits for her at the end of the night.

Edwarda's filthy animality connects Bataille's theories of humans, animals, eroticism and the abject, and forms thus one of the most powerful threads in the text. Bataille carefully highlights human consciousness, an awareness of sex and everything associated with it, as the internal inspiration responsible for intercourse. Animals, he counters, have no awareness of sex before or after it occurs and have no psychological mechanism with which to pursue sex. Bataille maintains the explicit argument that the animal:

> does not have a subjective life but this life seems to be conferred upon it like an inert object, once and for all. Human eroticism differs from animal sexuality precisely in this, that it calls inner life into play. In human consciousness eroticism is that within a man which calls his being into question. Animal sexuality does make for disequilibrium and this disequilibrium is a threat to life, but the animal does not know that. Nothing resembling a question takes shape within it. (29)

Examining the sexual negotiation between Edwarda and the narrator illustrates Bataille's claim. The internalization of sex happens only within the narrator, who observes and analyzes every detail. Edwarda navigates each scene as if her desires simply happen to and within her, and rather than thinking about the choices she makes, she persistently appears to be indulging needs she does not care to understand.

This indulgence is consistent, surfacing and resurfacing at key moments in the text. She does not reflect upon their needy lovemaking in the foyer, the narrator describing that she speaks to him "avec le sourire infini de l'abandon" (23). Her decision to rush into the night is also capricious: "le faisant, son *caprice* maintenant parfois, de sa chair à la mienne, un échange sournois" (23).[57] Abjective, animal desires interrupt even her decision to travel in the taxi, their eventual final resting place, to Les Halles: "[E]lle arrêta la voiture en frappant la voiture et descendit. Elle approcha jusqu'à le toucher le chauffeur et lui dit: '–Tu vois…je suis à poil…viens" (34). Bataille's proposition that "[a]nimal sexuality does make for disequilibrium and this disequilibrium is a threat to life, but the animal does not know that" (29) establishes the theoretical framework in which the narrator's lust provokes her animality and in which both parties must eventually die. If the intellectualization of sex separates human from animal, and Edwarda does not engage in this internalization, her most abjective animal-like quality is this exact inability to associate thought with sex. This "disequilibrium" threatens life, and the magnetic pull the narrator feels toward Edwarda is to her animalized, primitive sexuality.

Opposing her careless abandon, the narrator's invested analysis of Edwarda and the intimacy they share is similarly repeated throughout the story. His intense focus on his partner yields further descriptions of her animality as the couple transitions from the foyer to her private quarters. As her partner's desire for her increases, so does her animality. Their actions within her room are but briefly described, but we do know that their movements are not reflected as human in the mirrors covering the walls of the room. The narrator tells of "les glaces qui tapissaient les murs, et dont le plafond lui-même était fait, multipliaient l'image animale d'un accouplement" (26). Her reaction to the coupling behaviorally indicates an animal's, as she

[57] Emphasis mine.

eagerly flees immediately after the act. She expresses as much only upon dressing in clothes that seemingly depict her as an animal: "Elle passa un boléro blanc, dissimula sous un domino sa nudité: le capuchon du domino lui couvrait la tête, un loup à barbe de dentelle lui masqua le visage. Ainsi vêtue, elle m'échappa et dit: –Sortons!" (26). The domino cloak features a mask that would have effaced her human features, its hood covering her hair and the lace trim distorting her face. The mask itself is in French called *un loup*, which also means "wolf" or "sea bass." The great differences between these two beings gives the impression that the mask has not simply disguised her, but transformed Edwarda into a creature that defies easy categorization or obvious identification. The narrator witnesses this evolution: "Elle se hâtait, m'échappant: le loup qui la masquait la faisait animale" (27).

He follows her as she flees, her desperation to escape and effort to hide from him are easy metaphors for the hunter pursuing his prey. Even still, the narrator senses that yet more abjection remains to share with Edwarda, and he pursues her, realizing:

> Sans y avoir un instant songé, je 'savais' qu'un temps d'agonie commençait. J'acceptais, je désirais souffrir, d'aller plus loin, d'aller, dussé-je être abattu, jusqu'au 'vide' même. Je connaissais, je voulais connaître, avide de son secret, sans douter un instant que la mort régnât en elle. (29)

The abjection he craves from her conforms to Bataille's sex/death continuum; his wish to have sex with her has become his wish to die with her. This narrative thread carefully represents Bataille's insistence that sex and death are not merely linked, but that the former actually creates the latter. One can never be present without the other. Edwarda's abjective appeal does not result simply from her dirtiness, or from her bestial form and movements. Her ultimate abjective appeal is that to desire her is to desire to die with her.

Her movements become more and more animal-like, and the seizure that she experiences mirrors the terror and desperation of a caged and wounded animal:

> Comme un tronçon de ver de terre, elle s'agita, prise de spasmes respiratoires. Je me penchai sur elle et dus tirer la dentelle du loup qu'elle avalait et déchirait dans ses dents…Les sauts de poisson de son corps, la rage ignoble exprimée par son visage mauvais, calcinaient la vie en moi et la brisaient jusqu'au dégoût. (30)

Though her ferocity corresponds to the behavior of a large and capable mammal, like a tiger or a wolf, Bataille describers her as an animal much lower on the food chain. Like the octopus from the earlier bestial imagery, neither earthworms nor fish have nervous systems; Edwarda's animality is basic, fundamental, primitive.

Despite that Edwarda has collapsed to the ground in spasms, it cannot be to this illness that she succumbs: it must therefore be sex. The final moments of the *récit* involve the narrator observing, even assisting, Edwarda as she seduces a taxi cab driver in his taxi. This sex can only result in their deaths, and images of animality illustrate this final abjection. Edwarda insists that the driver take them to Les Halles (a former commercial center of Paris that, notably, was known for its butchers and sale of meat), but before they can depart, she makes her move. Removing the cloak and *loup* unsheathes Edwarda's nudity; the imagery that describes her is more animal-like than ever. She mutters to the narrator that she is "[n]ue comme une bête" and approaches the driver, persuading "[t]u vois...je suis à poil...viens" (34). The narrator recounts that "(l)e chauffeur immobile regarda la bête: s'écartant elle avait levé haut la jambe, voulant qu'il vît la fente" (34). As Bataille has explained, nakedness blurs the boundaries between the normative and abjective, and Edwarda's exposed body and self-identification as a beast (even the reference to *poil* reminds of animal fur, indicating several steps up the evolutionary ladder from worms and

octopi) display these hazy borders. Her vagina also appears as a beast, which, faithful to Bataille's assertions, reinforces the fusion of desire and abjection. Her genitals are once again operating independently from Edwarda's psychology.

Though the driver engages actively in their lovemaking, the scene remains a portrayal of the intimacy and abjection shared between Edwarda and the narrator. He describes that he holds her up as she straddles her new partner: "lui soutenant la nuque, je lui vis les yeux blancs" (34). The third party participates without a word, and the narrator merely describes, never interacts, with him. Nevertheless, the persistent flow of repulsion and magnetism maintained between the narrator and Edwarda seemingly separates them even from her new lover. Within the *place* of the taxi, the pair has forged a *space* that is theirs alone, even excluding the man with whom Edwarda has sex in this *place*. Though the vehicle represents the transition that the trio makes from sex into death, encapsulating sex, desire and abjection, it can also be seen as a socially sanctioned, quotidian location redefined by the sex taking place within it. The abjection of this scene resides not in the act of their intercourse—heterosexual, vaginal sex—but rather in her allegorized state of animality, a condition that pushes her, per Bataille's philosophy, toward death.

Like MacGregor, Allan Stoekl sees *Madame Edwarda* as a series of systematic and ritualistic exchanges. His insights have illustrated that this ultimate scene is an exchange "between the divine and the human, certainly, but also between the active and the passive; the alive and the inanimate; the male and the female" (87). Though Stoekl sees *Madame Edwarda* as a synthesis of the substitutions present in ritual, specifically Catholic mass and the reception of the host, the exchange of the active and the passive is especially pertinent as it relates to animality. In other words, as the narrator follows Edwarda into the street, ostensibly hunting an

animal, is not he who is ultimately trapped? Raising the issue of who leads whom (at certain moments, the narrator leads Edwarda, and in others, she leads him), Stoekl wonders, "[W]ho, at the end of the story, will do the leading…? The human, presumably will drive, or lead, the other, the non-human. But is it that simple? Is there ever a non-human? Isn't the non-human itself a joining of the animal and the divine?" (87). His analysis of ritual substitution is keen, but I submit that Edwarda *is* the quintessential non-human, or post-human, precisely because she is such a joining of animality and divinity. The narrator's abjective lust for her has provoked her non-humanness, and the Edwarda we see at the end of the story is a new creation, not a substitution.

The divine abjective unison of sex and death, as Bataille might call it, accompanies her animality. These traits coupled in Edwarda's distinctly womanly form (Bataille is not short on description of her body) suggest that she defies meaning: the narrator describes her as "folle, évidemment venue d'un autre monde, et, dans les rues, moins qu'un fantôme, un brouillard attardé" (29). Her insistent claim, which becomes the narrator's eventual recognition, that she is God is the queerest aspect of the abjective sexuality in the text: the sickly, animal-like prostitute as God provides searing imagery that harshly opposes the tropes of oppressive Christian patriarchy.[58]

In the final scene of the tale, threads of animality and Christianity are absent and readers observe the ideal depiction of Bataille's sex/death fusion. Observing Edwarda and the driver, the

[58] Bataille's feelings about Christianity are articulated in an essay entitled "Christianity," which appears in *Eroticism*. Within it, he takes to task Christianity's marginalization of transgression, namely via the Catholicism's boundary-based categorization of heaven (reserved for those steadfast in their continuity) and hell (reserved for those who have transgressed, and reigned by Satan, the ultimate transgressor).

narrator appears addicted to the anguish provoked by her ecstasy and experiences a greater joy in response to her sexuality, indeed her orgasm, than any other described in the text:

> du fond de ma tristesse, je sentis le torrent de sa joie de se libérer. Mon angoisse s'opposait au plaisir que j'aurais dû vouloir: le plaisir douleureux d'Edwarda me donna un sentiment épuisant de miracle. Ma détresse et ma fièvre me semblaient peu, mais c'était là ce que j'avais, les seules grandeurs en moi qui répondissent à l'extase de celle que, dans le fond d'un froid silence,j'appelais "mon cœur." (35)

The narrator rejoices in the visibility of Edwarda's orgasm, as if her own physiological orgasmic response to abjection, an allegorical ejaculation, is what he has been pursuing all along. In response to "le torrent de sa joie de se libérer," he recounts, "À la racine, la crue qui l'inonda rejaillit dans ses larmes: les larmes ruisselèrent des yeux" (34). Only the narrator notices her orgasm ("je sentis Madame Edwarda, dont mes mains contenaient les fesses, elle-même en même temps déchirée") and its physical manifestation can be seen as an insistence that death is imminent.

The moment of climax was fatal, and Bataille metaphorically kills the three near the end of the story. "J'avais éteint:," he writes, "elle s'endormait à demi, comme un enfant. Un même sommeil dut nous appesantir, Edwarda, le chauffeur, et moi" (35). In fact, this is the last detail that we hear about Edwarda and the driver. Death is suggested; "j'avais éteint" would, in its intransitive form ("je me suis éteint"), imply death, even suicide. And yet the narrator awakes several lines later, despairing, "Du sommeil qui nous laissa, peu de temps, dans le fond du taxi, je me suis éveillé malade, le premier…Le reste est ironie, longue attente de la mort…" (36).[59]

[59] That the narrator awoke first implies that both the driver and Edwarda eventually awoke, as well.

Through Bataille's lens, we understand that death was inevitable. Death must follow sex, and her primitive, animal sexuality signifies that Edwarda's humanity has failed: only death can resolve this failure. Sensing their propulsion toward death, the narrator's desire for Edwarda becomes stronger still, revealing that his desire for her was ultimately an insistence on satisfying a necrophiliac indulgence. Edwarda's already-dying body excites him by reminding him of his own mortality, of his own nearness with death, of his own subjectivity. As Kristeva has explained:

> corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit–*cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without the border? (4)

The narrator cannot exist without direct and intentional contact with this border, with death, with the dying and dead body of Edwarda. This border enfolds their abjection that inspires their sex and invents the intimate *space* they share among the *places* surrounding them. The *space* forged by the lovers' abjective sentiments within the *place* of the taxi has become their coffin, and the final lovemaking here suggests that the taxi, though stationary, still transitions its occupants from

one place to another. They evolve from life into death, from human into animal, and above all, from bodies to corpses.

5.4 RESTRICTED SPACE AND LIMITLESS POSSIBILITIES

Though it may be unclear whether Edwarda and her lovers passed away in the taxi or later on, their deaths are an obvious release from misery and despair. Their aberrant lovemaking, motorized by abjective desire, does not merely represent Bataille's philosophical certainty that eroticism and death are misunderstood and distorted by the filter of masculine hegemony and religion; it also illustrates the regulation of impossible social standards of sex, death offering a final and ultimate liberation. Sex, space and abjection unite in *Madame Edwarda* to construct relief from such standardization through transition. Darrieussecq's *Truismes* reiterates these themes showcasing them in the opposite environment of closed and restricted space. Though Darrieussecq's biography is largely unrelated to Bataille's, and *Truismes* is superficially dissimilar to *Madame Edwarda*, the two *œuvres* connect intimately along the lines of abjective sex, space, and notions of transition. Bataille's work offers metaphysical and philosophical understandings of transition—actual human to figurative animal, life to figurative death—while Darrieussecq uses transition far more literally, writing about fluctuating species and corporeal instability. While desire emerges as a common factor in both texts, its manifestation is quite different. Abjective lust has special importance in *Truismes*; the animal-like changes that take place within the female protagonist, provoked by this lust, are physiological and very visible. In fact, this narrator finds that her corporeal transition mirrors the transition of her psychological subjectivity. These changes maintain a relationship with space that operates oppositionally to the

corresponding relationship in *Madame Edwarda*; spatial environment, especially the most and the least restricted spaces, force transition within the narrator. The secret of abjection in this text is concealed rather than exposed.

Judith Butler provides a firm theoretical basis from which to address the idea that emotion, attention or affection may have significant implications for the most fundamental layers of subjectivity. She wonders in *Undoing Gender* about the limits and terms imposed on the solidifying subjectivities of the gender ambiguous. Speaking in particular about those bodies that have somehow resisted gendered or sexed categorization, Butler asserts that the "criterion that posits coherent gender as a presupposition of humanness, is not only one which, justly or unjustly, governs the recognizability of the human, but one that informs the ways we do or do not recognize ourselves at the level of feeling, desire, and the body" (58). She posits that via the desire for another, be it with love or with lust, this other is designated as legibly gendered, and as legibly human. If another human finds erotic or romantic properties within this subject, the subject must also be human. Desire is the authorization of being; it permits us to exist, our existence noticeable, once we have been wanted. This interpellation suggests that some primary part of us thus changes upon being desired.

Truismes showcases intersections of just such interpellation, permitting readers to be privy to the consequences of her abject desire in textual spaces that are, in fact, intended for privacy. The narrator of the book, a woman who remains anonymous throughout, transitions from an undereducated prostitute to a pig with flourishing literacy skills. The evolution of her intellectual potential occurs as she becomes more and more porcine, a state curiously propelled by others' erotic desire for her changing body. Her femaleness is static—she begins that tale a woman and ends it as a sow—so this desire can be called heterosexual, though it is hardly

heteronormative. As she consistently vacillates between the human and the animal, never truly embodying either form, the lust provoked by her bestial femaleness can therefore be seen as a disruption to, rather than a reinforcement of, heteronormativity. Queerness dislocates from the body and re-positioned along the hazy lines of lust, implying that who we are has everything to do with who finds us worthy of desire.

One goal of this section of the chapter is to expose the presence of a straight-but-queer dynamic in the text. Firstly, I locate the apparatus of a hegemonic patriarchy in *Truismes* by claiming that the narrator's experiences with spatial confinement, corporeal transition, and sexuality function as interstice between various stages of her transformation from woman to sow. Secondly, my analysis reveals that the queer heterosexual desire manifested by her lovers propels her corporeal conversion. Abjection activates desire, as these lovers pursue not heteronormative sex with a woman, but bestial (queer, abjective) sex with a mammal who defies description. A final argument centers around the understanding that this queer desire ultimately cultivates the personal liberation of its object, a woman otherwise confined by patriarchy, and hence permits a freedom nurtured by literacy and the individual expression of writing. The escape from this hegemony permits the evolution of her subjectivity, and it not only comes in the form of her transformation from woman to pig, but also what has been called her *écriture cochonne*, a tension that calls to mind the theories of Roland Barthes and Hélène Cixous.

To these three components, space is intimately linked. Confinement houses the queer, abjective desire that compels her evolution, and her personal and corporeal freedoms are realized as she seeks spatial freedom. In this chapter, I prove that space acts as a rhetorical tool that imparts messages about sex and sexuality. The places and spaces in *Truismes* are highly non-normative because though their inhabitants may be largely heterosexual, the currents of desire

therein are highly queer. Spatiality and corporeality bear different responsibilities in *Truismes* than what we have seen in *Madame Edwarda*. As the narrator's transformation from woman to sow gains momentum, we see that space impacts (rather than is impacted by) the evolution that takes place in her body. This evolution itself arouses bestial, anti-normative eroticism, the abjective secret of *Truismes*.

As my insistence that the rhetorical presence of space is an essential theme, I call upon Michel de Certeau, Gillian Rose and Judith Halberstam to help make sense of the spaces and places described by Darrieussecq's narrator. De Certeau describes the subversive city spaces that I argue permit the transformation experienced by the narrator, while Halberstam's positioning of the rural space as a queer space supports my assertions regarding the narrator's eventual liberation from urban confinement to rural self-exploration. Rose's detailed analysis of masculine consciousness in the physical and psychological construction of space mirrors the patriarchal oppressions present in *Truismes*.

My claims regarding queer desire for the hybrid narrator are heavily influenced by so-called Straight Queer Theory. Non-normative sexual practices and representations within heterosexual sex can be as disruptive to heteronormative binaries as queer sex. Defining these terms in *Straight with a Twist*, Calvin Thomas asserts that Queer Theory benefits from the consideration of non-normative heterosexual sex practices as a way in which to further the insights of queer theory. In the case of *Truismes*, this proliferation is represented as spatially, abjectively, and sexually inflected transformation.

Richard Fantina, the editor of *Straight Writ Queer*, describes so-called "Straight Queer Theory" that has direct implications for this dissertation. He insists that "an interrogation of some straight sexual practices demonstrates that many of these can be subversive to patriarchal

values and institutions of same-sex practices" (14). In fact, according to Fantina, Straight Queer Theory allows us to consider "transgressive acts and counterhegemonic gender positions [which] blur the divide between homo- and heterosexuality, while deconstructing heteronormativity" (14). The heterosexual lust displayed by many men for the narrator's transitioning but ever-female form composes just such a counterhegemonic gender position, an opposing current to the dominant patriarchy against which she struggles in the text.

Patriarchy stands out as one of the most dynamic themes in *Truismes* and appears often in critical readings of the text. Anat Pick also identifies a pervasive masculine dominance within. She writes: "That feminism, along with other liberal and 'liberationist' discourses (especially those pertaining to sexual liberation), has in some grave sense failed is […] a possibility Darrieussecq's text goes some way to articulate" (44). *Truismes* represents a testament to the insufficiencies and failures of Western feminism and calls to humans to treat each other as such. The anthropomorphism featured here relates not to people evolving into animals, but more specifically to people's whose evolution into animality signals "better" and more moral behavior. Pick's close reading of the text is astute, most especially in her discussions of the sexuality and patriarchy found in the text. I disagree, however, with her analysis that the relationship between the narrator's developing subjectivity and the process of self-recognition in the mirror forms the narrator's primary vehicle of self-awareness:

> The 'naïve' narrator of Pig Tales may not engage in philosophical deliberations of the dictum *nosce te ipsum* […] but she does look in the mirror to see herself made and remade across a visual field of differences that form and deform her. She oscillates between regarding her bodily transformations as hideous and as alluring, in full recognition of her incomplete humanity. In her very mindlessness,

> then, the heroine of Pig Tales arrives (perhaps more authentically and immediately than the theoretician or the philosopher) at the grotesque becoming of the human. (48)

The narrator's perception of herself in the mirror is not "full recognition" and should not be credited as the unifying determiner in her sense of self. She understands her transition at times, and at others, is unaware of the process she undergoes. This ignorance is consistent; she is equally unaware of her own oppression and most importantly how her oppression originates in the "pervasive masculine dominance" she cannot escape.

Masculine authority takes shape in *Truismes* in the form of space and place, of the very rooms the narrator navigates. These areas are rhetorical symbols that explain not only to the narrator, but to readers, as well, where she may be permitted entry, and where her presence is transgressive. Gillian Rose provides ways to think about such a masculinized, heterodominant space as a regulatory force in public life. Forging such space results from patriarchal hegemony, she explains, because space as we understand it relates to the mobility of bodies as they leave and enter spaces which they do or do not have permission to experience. Something as historically plain as cartography exposes the inherently masculine foundation in the mapping of space. Rose elucidates:

> [M]asculine consciousness peers into the world, denying its own positionality, mapping its spaces in the same manner in which Western white male bodies explored, recorded, surveyed and appropriated spaces from the sixteenth century onwards: from a disembodied location free from sexual attack or racist violence. Space for them is everywhere; nowhere is too threatening or too different for them to go. Time-geographers become the invisible observers of social life,

> tracing its patterns and making sense of it all, its reproduction, resistance and contradiction. (29)

Rose's time-geographers were the informed, white, Christian men of cartography's heyday whose perception of space became historical tradition. The time-geographers of *Truismes* are therefore not the men in the narrator's midst, but rather the permanent patriarchal tradition of which they are a part. They may not have constructed or mapped the spaces into which she moves, but their bodies move within and between them in ways that are fundamentally different from hers. This reading of *Truismes* demonstrates that the body instrumentalizes spatial instruction.

An oppressive patriarchal hegemony exists in the text in the form of the men by whom the narrator is regularly hyper-sexualized. There is Edgar, a politician who uses the narrator's body to advance his campaign; the always un-named director of the massage parlor where she works, an environment in which he regularly exploits for his gain; Honoré, the boyfriend who depends upon her employment as a sex worker; and finally the many clients who exploit her out of an abjective longing for her remarkable form. Though the narrator who is corporeally ambiguous, the desire experienced by these men that qualifies as queer. Their lust is for a female, they are heterosexual, but their erotic investment in her is far from straight.

The gaze of these men magnetized by her pig-like body keeps the narrator immobilized within this masculine hegemony. A relationship between spatial limitation and the animal/human body thus emerges, one that reveals a link between the narrator's hybridity, her uncompromised femaleness, and tight, controlled space. Not long after she begins to notice changes in her form, the narrator travels to a local water park. With no means of purchasing a subway ticket, she has little choice but to follow closely behind a man passing through the turnstiles of the Métro: "J'ai bien senti que je faisais de l'effet au monsieur; pour tout dire,

beaucoup plus d'effet que je n'en faisais d'habitude. Il a fallu, dans les salons de déshabillage de l'Aqualand, que je lave discrètement ma jupe" (14). At this stage in the text, she recognizes the changes that occur to her humanity, and the man next to her feels, even if subconsciously, excited by this burgeoning animality, so much so that he cannot or chooses not to control his physical arousal and ejaculates on her clothes. The stain of sperm, this mark of maleness, is only possible because her liminal body is literally pushed up against the bodies of men in the narrow spaces created by revolving turnstiles, positioning the men in this scene as the metaphorical walls of patriarchy between which she is trapped. The narrator's movement within this scene is limited, as she does not have access to the train, and attaching herself to the body of a man, of a descendant of time-geographers gone-by, can be her only means of advancement.

The dressing rooms at Aqualand are also confined spaces, significant because these small spaces are highly sexualized by park patrons: "Il faut savoir s'éclipser quand le salon est déjà occupé par un couple; là aussi il y a toujours des messieurs pour attendre devant les portes côtés femmes. On peut bien gagner sa vie à Aqualand" (14). Once again, the imagery of the scene implies that patriarchy is inescapable – it literally waits outside the door. Rose would see the men perched at the dressing room door as proof of time-geography; they sense that their presence in this female-specific space is permitted, even desired.

As her body continues to change, becoming more and more porcine, the narrator returns to the park and the small dressing rooms with Honoré, a lover both repulsed and aroused by her abjective corporeality. He expresses his desire in a non-normative fashion: "[I]l m'a sodomisée. Je crois qu'il ne pouvait même plus penser à mon vagin…j'avais pour ainsi dire une vue imprenable sur ma vulve, et je trouvais qu'elle dépassait étrangement" (58). The rhetorical message here is one of recognition and self-awareness. The narrator becomes aware of her

altered vagina only because she sees it as she leans forward to allow Honoré to sodomize her. Her claim that it protrudes *étrangement* calls further attention to many strange factors of her situation: her body, his desire, and their intimate acts. In this space, the rejection of her vagina as a non-viable part of sex en lieu of the androgynous anus is a queer act that permits an understanding of the narrator's queer body.

This recognition of her changing genitals has great relevance. The narrator remains female despite her animality, and this femaleness is confusing and arousing for her boyfriend. He rejects, for the first time in the text, vaginal penetration, ostensibly because, as she admits, her genitals no longer appear human. He does desire something about her that he cannot quite understand, however, and therefore pursues sex with her anyway, channeling this abjective lust into the act of sodomy. As her animality draws in Honoré, her vagina repulses him and her sexually androgynous anus stimulates him. The narrator finds herself transfixed and revolted by her transformed genitals, and cannot look away. That all of this takes place within the confines of a dressing room, encapsulating sex, sexuality and animality, implies that such encapsulation generates the influence these themes have on her changing form.

Additionally, *imprenable*, meaning "untouchable" or "impregnable," is a key adjective here. This reinforces Honoré's rejection of her genitals. The idiomatic phrase in this sentence – *avoir une vue imprenable* – simply means "to have an obstructed view," but because it is also used here to refer to a view of her vagina, readers are forced to consider that the narrator's vagina is truly not obstructed. She is certainly not impregnable – she becomes pregnant at least three times in the text – but anal sex, the intercourse her lovers choose the most, has no reproductive value. These pregnancies reinforce her femaleness, but threaten her relationships and her

livelihood. The vagina is thus the locus of desire and repulsion; some lovers are drawn to it, even impregnating her, and others are driven away by it, choosing instead to sodomize her.

Pick sees this increased interest in sodomy as a reinforcement of patriarchal power. She finds that sodomy reflects the systematic oppression of the narrator, claiming that "the novel's emphasis on anal sex eschews humanity's 'proper' reproductive practices. Sodomy marks an economy of power relations across the double threshold of gender/species, by which 'man' (masculine/human) subjugates both women and animals" (50). Also pointed out by Pick, anal sex between a man and a woman is especially queer. It values one site of sexual interaction over a more traditional point of penetration and is anti-reproductive, an additional element of the text that proves that straight sex need not be heteronormative.

The narrator's work as a prostitute who masquerades as a masseuse reveals yet another restricted space in which her liminal, abjective body provokes desire. As at Aqualand, the boutique where she works features changing rooms, "salons d'essayage," in which she and her co-workers are expected to massage their clients using the name-brand oils and lotions sold there. *Salons d'essayage* literally means "trying rooms," implying that clients are to try out the various cosmetic products for sale, but within them, clients try instead very non-normative modes of lovemaking.

Duncan's claim that prostitutes exceed the boundaries of heteronormativity reinforces the queerness of their sexual interaction. With the narrator, her clients are invited and expected to invest in non-normative sexual practices; this not only challenges to normative edict of husband and wife, but confronts the limited, standardized sex acts available to heteronormative heterosexuals.

In this context of commercialized prostitution, her clients, her boss and economy at large each exploit the narrator. The role of the perfumery in the novel is thus quite critical, as it exacerbates her transformation. Becoming extremely popular with her clients, she recounts: "J'avais de plus en plus de clients masculins à la boutique, et ils payaient bien, le directeur de la chaîne passait presque tous les jours pour ramasser l'argent, il était de plus en plus content de moi. Mes massages avaient le plus grand succès" (19). The more she transforms, the more repulsive and enticing she becomes to her clients, the more money she earns, and the more she pleases her employer, thus imprisoning her in a cycle of attention stimulated by, but also stimulating, her animal-like form.

Such images involve a second sort of transition; the metaphor for change in the dressing room is quite clear, but even the turnstiles involve the movement across a barrier, from one place to another. Consequently, the narrator does not undergo change alone; her clients, who accompany her in these spaces, appear transformed, as well, and during their lovemaking to the narrator heteronormativity begins to untangle. She claims: "Les clients que je préférais maintenant, c'étaient ceux qui me demandaient de les attacher pour leur massage. Ça me changeait. Je pouvais en profiter comme je voulais…Quand je me relevais le client avait lui aussi les yeux tout dénoués. On se serait crus dans la jungle" (39). These clients are described as "dénoués," which literally means "disentangled," calling to mind the disentanglement of these intimate moments from those regulated by heteronormative standards of sex, untangled from the world of polarized sexualities, and reminding us that these men are, as she is, in a new bestial world, in the jungle.

The sex acts her clients wish to perform with her become more and more animal-like, as well, and she recounts that, "Les clients appéciaient de voir leurs fleurs tout contre mes seins. Ils

se penchaient sur moi, et hop, d'un coup de dents, ils venaient les cueillir dans mon décolleté, et ensuite ils les mâchaient d'un air gourmand en me regardant par en dessous" (35). The narrator also remarks that her clients have expressed more and more interest in sodomizing her, saying "mes clients avaient de drôles d'envies, des idées tout à fait contre nature" (36). Her transition from woman to pig provokes this increasing desire on the part of her clients and lovers, and their predilection for an intimacy mobilized by animality responds to her shift in species. When speaking of their ever greater wish for anal sex, the narrator positions it as "against nature," representing her awareness that her animality triggers desire for her anus, but stifles desire for her vagina. Such positioning criticizes what heteronormativity supposes "natural" and "normal" to be.

Bataille's conclusions about the prostitute are also especially applicable to *Truismes*. If the taboo here is simply initiating sex with a prostitute, it is transgressed once and then again by first engaging in such sex, and then by indulging in sexual ritual that is more bestial than human. Everything about Darrieussecq's narrator confirms a comfort with the taboo and among the profane that reiterates Bataille's claim that the prostitute exists un-influenced by the abject around her: "The various objects of taboo evoke neither horror nor nausea in them, or too little at any rate. But without feeling [horror and nausea] intensely themselves they know what other's people's reactions are" (135). Futhermore, Bataille sees the co-existence of the "low prostitute" and the abject as indicative of this immunity:

> The lowest kind of prostitute has fallen as far as she can go. She might be no less indifferent to the taboo than animals are except that because what she knows about taboos is that others observe them, she cannot attain an absolute indifference; not only has she fallen but she knows she has. She knows she is a

> human being. Even if she is not ashamed of it, she does know that she lives like a pig. (135)

Though at times she is acutely aware of her abjective desires, often obsessed and overwhelmed by them, she is most astute at predicting and identifying these same feelings in her patrons. The narrator knows that abjective sex defies normative regulation and understands its taboo, but realizes that her transitioning body renders her immune. Her hybridity cannot be regulated; the concealment of the *salons d'essayage* keeps its secret of abjective desire.

In these confined secret spaces, the taboo and the profane are provoked, reminding us that space is truly an active character in the novel. Such transgressions become manifested in and through the body via the queer actions and movements shared by the narrator and her clients during their intercourse. These bodies, as did Edwarda with Angélique, impact the same restricted spaces in which these transitions occur by sexualizing them, re-defining them as areas of non-normative of desire and sexual practice. The important difference lies in that Edwarda and her lover used space to display what the narrator and her clients hide. These men become psychologically impacted by her bestiality, joining her not by transforming their bodies, but by relishing queer behaviors. Their queer desire and her changing form render these spaces queer in content and presentation.

That the city of Paris, a major world capital, is the background for such settings of sex and confinement is a reinforcement of what de Certeau might call "the microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress, but which have outlived its decay" (96). The queer sex and desire experienced by and with the narrator are not lived out on broad display in the open boulevards of a metropolis; they are, instead, demonstrated in restricted spaces prudently obscured by other, larger spaces. In other words, a

dressing room within a boutique located at a water park situated in a neighborhood of a large city is a metaphorical microbe of a much larger organism. The microbial *salons d'essayage* are a *space* encased within the *place* of Paris. Rather than maneuvering un-noticed between the cracks of normative regulation, they inhabit it, shielded from it by disguise.

The confined spaces themselves are sites of queerness, somehow immune, or at least resistant, to the urban social regulation implied by de Certeau. They are a part of the pulsating, individual forces that comprise a city space. He emphasizes their subversive value by maintaining:

> [O]ne can follow the swarming activity of these procedures that, far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, have reinforced themselves into the networks of surveillance, and combined in accord with unreadable but stable tactics to the point of constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization.[60] (96)

By embedding such unreadable tactics as sodomy and bestiality deep within heterosexuality, by carefully concealing them within patriarchy, within the sex industry and within heterosexual relationships, and most critically, by motoring them with seemingly heteronormative desire, the confined spaces that facilitate the transformation of the narrator remain imperceptible to a panoptic administration. A legible gloss of normativity–the *salons d'essayage* of the massage parlor and Aqualand, the turnstile of the Métro, the hotel room, the crypt of a cathedral–suppresses the illegibility of the spaces. The sex and sexuality that collide in these constrained

[60] The procedures de Certeau cites are the urban movements and motions that deflect panoptic detection.

areas escape regulation and correction, persisting in their queerness and making these small spaces potent fields of queer rhetoric.

The thread of confinement as it relates to sex and transition resurfaces in *Truismes* when, at a particularly bestial state in her transition, the narrator checks into a hotel much like the well-known chain Formule 1. There she inhabits a room not much more than sterilized cell. The janitor of the property falls in love with her, and under his gaze, her form changes yet again as she slowly transitions into a more womanly state. As before, the affection and attention of a man influence this change, though in this case, his sentiments for her evoke her human state:

> J'étais toute propre. Je me reposais. Je restais sur mon lit et je n'avais plus mal au dos. J'avais moins de bouffissures sur le visage. Je m'efforçais de retrouver figure humaine, je dormais beaucoup, je me coiffais. Mes cheveux étaient presque tous tombés dans les égouts mais ils repoussaient maintenant. Je rognais mes ongles, je rasais mes jambes, et je voyais mes mamelles dégonfler, devenir de moins en moins visible. Il ne restait plus que les taches foncées des mamelons. (88)

Despite that his emotional investment in her spurs her humanity, even the narrator's human form defies categorization. She is homeless and uneducated, well outside the lines of the dominant social regulation of an address and a state-sponsored education, and in love with an illegal North African immigrant whose own language skills reflect that he, too, lives outside the lines: "Comme il parlait arabe la conversation n'était pas un problème, on ne disait rien, on se faisait des signes, on s'aimait bien." (89). This social illegibility is problematic enough to label her lover's desire for her as abjective and queer; he cannot express his desire in terms that she can

decipher. His language and ethnicity place him outside the lines, as does the narrator's nomadic fashion of "living off the map."

This social queerness ensures that the narrator does not remain long within normative parameters. She quickly returns to her sow form when he is arrested and taken away: "Et puis les gendarmes sont venus à l'hôtel et ils ont embarqué l'homme de ménage" (91). A pregnancy resulting from this union yields a litter of offspring she calls "things," having advanced too far into pig-hood to articulate an accurate description of them. Again, the normative parameters in which it occurs (in a typical hotel room with a heterosexual man) obscure queerness, but the ensuing pregnancy reminds us that queerness is latent but thriving.

By depicting a queerness that is exacerbated by microbial, quotidian spaces like the hotel room, the dressing room, and even the sewer in which the narrator births her little, Darrieussecq also challenges standard conceptions of Paris. Eventually, the city, too, is made into a queer space. Though the circumstances and the cause are never clear, Paris undergoes something of an apocalypse. Arguably the most well-known and most studied city in the world experiences violent disruption. Paris is certainly a prime location in which to identify Rose's time-geographers, as the city and its spaces have been scrutinized and mapped countless times by masculine consciousness. The turbulence brought about by an apocalypse confronts the hegemonic conception of space. This destruction cauterizes the new capital city, if not completely, of pervasive, masculine spaces; former spaces have been ruined and new spaces must be constructed. Paris is, like the narrator, transformed, and the urban queerness of a cultural capital re-conceived is undeniable. She undergoes this queer transformation from the confines of yet another restricted space that resists regulation from the normative gaze that falls upon it: "La guerre a éclaté et tout ça, il y a eu l'Épidémie, et puis la série de famines. Je m'étais

cachée dans la crypte de la cathédrale pendant tout ce temps, vous pensez, si on m'avait trouvée" (114). The cathedral here represents another branch of dominant patriarchy, this time one constructed by Catholicism/Christianity, and the narrator's concealment in a crypt, has positioned her beyond its regulation. It is a space of death and the transition to an other-worldly afterlife, both un-mappable states. Like the *salons d'essayage*, the turnstiles and the hotel room, corporeal queerness in the crypt of a cathedral self-obscures amidst normative surveillance.

By the end of *Truismes*, the narrator's corporeality experiences constant flux, a consistent ebb and flow between human and porcine. In addition to having almost fully transformed into a pig, she displays evidence of self-understanding and exploration in ways that were not present in her prior state. As a woman, she was uneducated and uninterested in study, but as a pig, reading and writing hold great appeal for her.

Texts are the initial point of attraction for the narrator. After stumbling upon some books, she explains: "J'ai eu du mal au début et puis c'est revenu très vite, les autres lettres se sont formées rapidement. . . Je me suis mise à lire tous les livres que je trouvais, ça faisait passer le temps et oublier la faim" (97). Words have become nourishment for her. She thrives on them, and they form the root of her self-release from patriarchy, and utimately, her human body. Her wish to read prospers into a desire to write, and she announces at the beginning of the text that she writes her story of transition by hand: "Mais il faut que j'écrive ce livre sans plus tarder, parce que si on me retrouve dans l'état où je suis maintenant, personne ne voudra ni m'écouter, ni me croire. Or tenir un stylo me donne de terribles crampes" (11). The book also closes with descriptions of her *écriture cochonne*: "J'écris dès que la sève retombe un peu en moi. L'envie me vient quand la Lune monte, sous la lumière froide je relis mon cahier" (148). Her investment in *lecture*/*écriture* permits her to maintain a degree of humanity in her animality. As a literate

pig, her corporeality does not limit the narrator's capacity to intellectualize the events that have occurred. Her literacy resists the restraints of a porcine body. It is not only important that the narrator write—it is important that she write as a pig. Doing so detaches literacy from humanity and resituates it within animality, thus tampering with standard understanding of literacy and effectively queering it.

The links that bind the body, the mind, and the written word cannot be discussed without considering Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine*, who believed that the physical movement of writing gave women access to self-understanding, self-reflection, and above all, liberation from phallocentrism. A Cixousian analysis of *Truismes* thus has great relevance, as the narrator's writing serves as record keeping of the animality that liberates her from phallocentrism. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous insists, "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has turned her into the uncanny stranger on display. . .Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth" (32). The *écriture cochonne* of the narrator parallels this dedication, as she pushes herself to write even when the physical movements of doing so are painful. Though her body has not been confiscated, her memories may be if she risks telling them as a woman. In these initial stages of her full-time life as a pig, she seeks to recall details that chance dissolution as she delves further into existence as an animal. The most poignant sign of her emancipation remains because these are not simply her thoughts, but her physical mark, words and recollections that she alone has imprinted onto paper, as well.

This emancipation declares, as Cixous might see it, a re-appropriation of the narrator's sexuality, because *écriture féminine* permits a reunion of a woman's body with her erotic desires. It releases a self-understanding of sexuality stifled by the language she lives in, a language

rooted in masculine dominance: "To write. An act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality. . . it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories" (32). Her physical desires have slowly become her own, as evidenced by her relationship with Yvan. In her pig writing, she recounts: "Les meilleurs moments, avec Yvan, c'étaient quand j'avais mes chaleurs. On faisait très attention à ne pas pousser trop de cris, mais qu'est-ce qu'on s'amusait! Yvan m'aimait autant en être human qu'en truie" (122). This is emotional emancipation; the narrator no longer feels guilt for enjoying sex too much, she can freely pursue it rather than limiting herself to sex with clients, and her body can be prized for its ambiguity, rather than fetishized.

Cixous also believed that writing has special connections to a woman's sexual space, and that writing allows women to reappropriate their hijacked sexuality, believing that the act "give[s] her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories" (32). These are the things that were stolen from the narrator during her tenure as a woman, and via her *écriture cochonne*, she reclaims her body. She even insists on holding her notebook her own way and positioning her body for reading as she chooses, rejecting advice from her dear Yvan: "J'essaie de faire comme me l'avait montré Yvan, mais à rebrousse-poil de ses propres méthodes: moi c'est pour retrouver ma cambrure d'humain que je tends mon cou vers la Lune" (148). Refusing Yvan's techniques of reading and writing represents the narrator's contention to create and sustain a writing and language that are her own. These are elements that are untraceable to her as a pig and unrepeatable by other humans and animals. Her awareness of the inaccessibility that her *écriture cochonne* presents becomes immediately clear from the first lines of *Truismes*:

> Je sais à quel point cette histoire pourra semer de trouble et d'angoisse, à quel point elle perturbera de gens. Je me doute que l'éditeur qui acceptera de prendre

> en charge ce manuscrit s'exposera à d'infinis ennuis. La prison ne lui sera sans doute épargnée, et je tiens à lui demander tout de suite pardon pour le dérangement…J'espère que l'éditeur qui aura la patience de déchiffrer cette écriture de cochon voudra bien prendre en considération les efforts terribles que je fais pour écrire le plus lisiblement possible. (11)

Believing that her writing and her story will become such a *dérangement* that future involved parties risk punitive consequences signifies its queerness; it chances the regulation and punishment of normative authority. The very act of being woman-sow sex worker who composes while in porcine form constructs an *illisibilité* that defies decoding.

Porcine writing can be viewed as a subversive, textual queer tool from yet another angle, as it rejects patriarchal power by escaping dominant human discourse. She writes neither as a woman, nor as a human, manifesting the kind of writing that Cixous said "always surpass[es] the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination" (35). Writing as a literate animal on the forest floor ensures that such domination has been successfully avoided.

It may be that the narrator's *écriture cochonne* is not, or is not only, feminist. Roland Barthes has identified a neutrality in writing, a space between two points in which meaning is created, and for the duration of the book, the narrator has negotiated the space between two points. According to Barthes, "meaning rests on conflict (the choice of one term against another), and all conflict is generative of meaning: to choose *one* and refuse the *other* is always a sacrifice made to meaning" (7). The act of writing, then, "outplays" the paradigm, which can be imagined here as the man/woman/ and/or human/animal binary, and Barthes praises the binarial dismantling. The *écriture cochonne* of the already-liminal narrator as a space between the points

of human and animal: "si on me retrouve dans *l'état où je suis maintenant*, personne ne voudra ni m'écouter ni me croire. Or tenir un stylo me donne de terribles crampes…j'écris très, très lentement" (11).[61] She leaves the forest at times to enter the human space of a farm house in order to "regarder la télévision," and to "téléphon[er] la mère du directeur de la parfumerie" (148), enjoying human interaction from a sow's body. The state the narrator occupies has no categorization and must therefore be understood as an un-aligned neutral ground. Her neutral writing eludes classification, an even greater denial of hegemonic power structures. Another queer reading of this portion of the text emerges as *écriture neutre* denies heteronormative regulation, a resistant expression that cannot be understood along the lines of patriarchal social standards.

As the story ends, the narrator, who has by now come to control her fluctuations between humanity and animality, chooses to remain a sow and spend her life in the forest. The forest, the ultimate queer space, absorbs the narrator into its inaccessibilty, totally unmonitored by the panoptic administration highlighted by de Certeau. The messages transmitted by a space so unregulated are not part of dominant discourse have rhetorical potency. Shedding the concealing, microbial spaces of Paris has liberated her from society's punitive function.

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson have claimed in the introduction to *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* that the wild and rural forest has not always resisted socio-sexual stereotypes. They view a relationship characterized by stereotypical masculinity as the dominant influence on rural space in the last century and one of the reasons for which the film *Brokeback Mountain* was so controversial. "[A]t least since the early twentieth-century," they write, "wild spaces have been understood and organized in a way that

[61] Emphasis mine.

presents nature—and its personal domination in the guise of hunting, fishing, climbing and other outdoor activities—as a site for the enactment of a specific heteromasculinity" (3). According to this framework, the forest in *Truismes*, is not immune to heteronormative oppression and in fact houses the heteromasculinity of a white, Christian, upper-class dominance. As Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson explain, "[w]hite men came to assert their increasingly heterosexual identities in the wilderness explicitly against the urban specter of the queer" (3). Undeniably, conceptions of rural or wild space are often activated by stereotypical masculine activities, but Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson have only considered the human factor when identifying the heteronormativity present there. The narrator of *Truismes* has rendered herself utterly unreadable by remaining a pig. She is unidentifiable as a criminal or a former human of any kind, and inaccessible even to the penetration of heteromasculinity. Furthermore, I would argue that Darrieussecq finds the forest, as other notable authors have done, to be a magical and fertile site of transformation.[62]

The narrator has in this way found a manner of escaping masculine patriarchy, and she has "come out" of the camouflaged and restricted spaces and entered the wilderness, where her bestial queerness can flourish unrestrained and she escapes normative penalty: "Ils ont trouvé mes empreintes sur le revolver à côté des cadavres, l'audimat va exploser. Mais ils peuvent toujours me chercher, maintenant" (148). "They," the representatives of panoptic administration, can look for her, but will not consider investigating another species in order to find her. Her very body is illegible and the abject desires that have accompanied her shape-shifting remain secret.

Halberstam speaks of the illegibility of rural queerness and its relationship with unrestricted space. She challenges conceptions of what she terms "metronormativity," the

[62] I speak here of the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's "As You Like It" (1623) and the wilderness surrounding the village in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

understanding that migration from rural to urban settings is a normal and even ideal part of coming out. She observes that:

> [i]t is easy to equate the physical journey from small town to big city with the psychological journey from closet case to out and proud […] But in actual fact, the ubiquity of queer sexual practices […] in rural settings suggests that some other epistemology than the closet governs small towns and *wide-open rural area*.[63] (*In A Queer Time and Place* 37)

Halberstam's ultimate argument is that rural setting serves as some other kind of "closet" to conceal queer behaviors, as if it is a non-queer, if not anti-queer, domain. But though the spaces of which Halberstam speaks may be rural, they are not in the truest sense of the term "wide-open," for which space is more wide-open or untamed than a forest? The forest appears in *Truismes* as the final truly queer space; it exceeds rurality. Un-mapped, un-plotted, and un-drawn, it resists the structured charting of Rose's time-geographers. The rhetorical meaning is unmistakable: the narrator's sexuality and animality can remain unchecked in the wilderness, free to develop and evolve in ways that suit her. In fact, she remains very sexually active, enjoying the company of wild boars, whose consistent attentions for a woman-like pig mirror those of her former lovers: "Je me suis acoquinée avec un sanglier très beau et très viril…Je ne suis pas mécontente de mon sort. La nourriture est bonne, la clairière confortable, les marcassins m'amusent" (148). Queer desire in this final scene of the text is not homosexual, or heterosexual, or even human.

Indeed, much of *Truismes* can be read as a post-human narrative. In some ways, the narrator goes beyond both Cixous and Barthes in that it is neither precisely the feminine nor the

[63] Emphasis mine.

neutral that has been reclaimed. At the end of the novel, she reclaims everything. To say that she regains control of her body would be an oversimplification; this narrator is no longer a woman selling sex, nor a beast for sale on the black market, nor at the mercy of corporeal transformations that she does not understand. Even Paris is reclaimed and rebuilt after its destruction. By devouring books and writing a memoir, the narrator constructs her literacy; she has constructed personal relationships with Yvan, her former boss' mother, and other animals; and perhaps most significantly, she has established a future for herself in the forest, an uncharted, wild-yet-enclosed space that has no institutional memory. That the narrator has found a place to indulge in a sexual and corporeal transformation that is simultaneously wide-open and carefully concealed represents an expertly strategic maneuver that underpins the queer dimensions of this novel. The intersections of queer desire and queer space have liberated her from a life of surveillance and scrutiny. This new autonomy somehow resolves the failures of feminism critiqued in text, because this choice to remain a pig illustrates that the narrator recognizes, accepts, and eventually masters her corporeality. She has chosen the space in which to do so, one that conceals her queer body but does not confine it.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Both *Truismes* and *Madame Edwarda* expose the usage of space to hide or exalt its contents, sex (queer or not, normative or not) being among the most attentively censored. We choose spaces for sex based upon understandings of whether or not such sex should be suppressed or released**.** When feelings of disgust or fear accompany that sex, when sex is had with the *deject* or the *stray*, the space that encases it becomes not only a protective tool of

concealment, but also a great secret keeper of abjective desires and acts. My analysis of these texts launches a conversation about instrumentalization of space as a protective seal of abjective secrets or as an expository display. The way we use space to share information or to bury it is just as important as the information itself, and though I believe that abjective desire is a fruitful starting point for the examination of abjection, sexuality and space, my hope is that this discussion provokes many more directionalities of spatial analysis in Gender and French Studies.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Over the course of the four previous chapters, I have proven that the presence of abjection—as criminality, as violence, as self-loathing, as the eroticization of outlawed bodies or acts—leads the textual figures studied here toward a more developed sense of self. For troubled Zahra, the abject desire for her illegible expressions of gender and for her systemic victimization, as characterized in *L'Enfant de sable*, led her toward the solidified sexual orientation and emotional fulfillment she experiences in *La Nuit sacrée*. Genet's texts depict a sense of self that is cultivated in relationship to community. In *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, inmate Jean's creation of Divine and Mignon helped him to imagine a community of like-minded social and sexual deviants, while in *Le Balcon*, Irma and her menagerie of prostitutes and clientele used the common ground of sexual deviancy to allegorize social revolution.

Studying film lends perhaps an even closer look at this trajectory toward self-understanding: Sophie in *La Cérémonie* gains false literacy but real self-confidence from her violent friendship with Jeanne; Manu's sexual agency flourishes in response to the brutality she shares with Nadine; and while Marie's killing spree ruins her relationship with Alex, her violence simultaneously serves as not just acknowledgement, but announcement, of her lesbianism. Bestial lust for Darrieussecq's porcine narrator nourishes her growing sense of self-worth as she relishes not only her new animal state, but now uses her animality to establish the literacy she never achieved as a woman. Even Bataille's Edwarda, in her descent into allegorized animality and figurative death, undergoes a transformation of self that, while it may not lend her agency,

seems in its own way to at least soothe her suffering. Each of these figures is in fact better off because of his or her abjective experiences.

6.1 THE PRODUCTIVE ABJECT

My interrogation of the relationship and abjection has yielded that it is, in fact, a greatly productive trajectory toward identity. Given the abject's association with disease, disgust and decay, its positive presence in subject formation has been one of the most surprising conclusions of this research. Its function as the advancement of desire contributes to the figures of this dissertation by helping them to understand themselves, albeit via moments of destruction. It is not simply that it contributes to a sense of self—it does so in particularly affirming ways. The figures studied in this dissertation reflect a renewed interest in life, and though the deaths of Manu, Edwarda, Divine and Jeanne were perhaps inevitable, it is important to note the enthusiasm they exhibit in the spaces prior to dying. Their final moments are punctuated with abjective, animated verve and flourish, especially in the eager examples that include Sophie, Zahra, the cast of *Le Balcon*, Darrieussecq's narrator, and even the institutionalized Marie. Abjection, seen in this light, thus becomes a rather wholesome instrument in constructing self-esteem, most probably because it exists in such frequency alongside identity-building questions of sexuality and desire.

What, then, when it comes to subjectivity, can come of studying sexuality and abjection independently of one and other? In this vein, the study of sexuality as an individual focus is not new, and to study the relationship of abjection alone to identity has largely been quarantined by the psychoanalysts. But is there a way to think about abjection and the self away from

psychoanalysis? How can we apply the lessons about productivity and identity learned in this dissertation to a study of abjection and subjectivity that does *not* include sexuality?

The nation may be a fertile site from which to answer such questions. Abjection in the sense of rejection, exclusion and elimination bears special stakes for notions of the nation, of The Other, and of national margins. Here, in fact, the abject's power of refusal stands alone; it needs not exist in relationship to tropes of sexuality and desire. Julien Maury's and Alexandre Busillo's 2007 film *À l'intérieur* offers just such a landscape, using the abject terror and violence of a horror film to allegorize boundaries of the nation and the family. Set during the 2004 riots that ravaged low-income Parisian suburbs, a pregnant woman fights off an attacker attempting to enter her home and to cut her unborn child from her womb. These abject acts occur without sexuality—in fact, the widowed pregnant woman can be seen to allegorize the Virgin Mary. The sheer gore displayed as the murderess gains illegal entry to the pregnant woman's home and body draws attention to messy French immigration politics, forcing the audience to ask questions about transgression, belonging and identity. Abjection alone highlights these issues without the additional provocativeness of sexuality, and while no particular figure within the film achieves subjectivity, the presence of abjection instead shifts that focus toward the identity of France as a whole.

The nation as the source of abjection is not exclusive to France. For example, Srđan Spasojević's heavily censored Serbian film aptly entitled *Srpski Film* (Serbian for *Serbian Film*) attempts to allegorize the historically complex nation-state of Serbia. Spasojević demonstrates how Serbia systematically manipulated and took advantage of its citizens in birth, life and death by paralyzing audiences with pornographic scenes of graphic pedophilia, including so-called "newborn porn," as well as necrophilia, incest, rape and torture. But we must note that to

describe it as "pornographic" is to use the term loosely, for even the film's willing characters are robbed of access to their own sexuality as well as access to their own sexual agency. Here, abject sex is not sex; abject sex is abject violence. Questions about Serbian national identity are raised through abjection not because of sex, but rather in spite of sex.

In these examples, the Kristevan abject—that which delineates the border between the object and the subject—now delineates the border between the citizen and its greatest enemy, whether that be The Alien Other or even its own manipulative national hierarchy. The presence of abjection in such films suggests that it persists in popular consciousness as a means of understanding who we are by identifying who we are not.

This process toward identity differs slightly from the figures studied in this dissertation, as their identifies shape in response to the figures that desire them, as well as to whom they desire. In the case of these horror films, subjectivities are forged through an abject and violent battle for self-preservation, rather than the abject battles for self-understanding waged by Zahra, Sophie and others. Abjection alone, without the organic companion of sexuality that I pair with it in this dissertation, encompasses questions of human movement and migration, thus suggesting that it is the very difficulty within these horror films—abject violence, physical and psychological pain, and death—that forces personal growth.

6.2 STRAIGHT QUEER THEORY

One of the "comings-out" that reoccurs throughout this dissertation takes place within heterosexual characters, whose personal growth relies not on acknowledging and accepting their heterosexuality, but rather on the self-actualization that accompanies their burgeoning sexual

agency, even though it is not necessarily unique that their chosen partners are of the "opposite" sex. For these characters—specifically Zahra, Darrieussecq's narrator, and even Manu—personal autonomy is directly proportional to sexual autonomy.

In *Le Balcon*, Irma's heterosexual clients also underwent personal growth, but collectively, and specifically in relationship to the revolution that their transgressive sex acts were intended to exemplify. But this play is the only text included among these case studies that offers the perspective of multiple figures sharing nearly identical experiences with abject (and metaphorically revolutionary) straight sex. Their intercourse is, then, inherently political.

In this case, these collective straight queer experiences bear a marked difference from the collective queer experience that are typically associated with identity politics: private space versus public space. The Bishop, the Judge and the General experience their queerness behind closed doors, within the intentionally confined and semi-private setting of the brothel. Genet intends for their subversive sexuality to mimic the revolution waged in the streets outside—subversive act to subversive act—but these sex acts occur intentionally in private and concealed spaces. Even Darrieussecq's porcine narrator experiences her queer corporeality as well as her queer desire in relationship to small, concealed spaces as the city of Paris collapses, only to be resurrected with new cultural and political structures in place just as the narrator's sense of self has solidified. Private space is key here, and these scenes cannot compare to the more common displays of queerness that intentionally take place in public. In other words, the textual politics of straight queer theory appear especially powerful, but have no real-world connection.

My close readings of these characters and scenes suggest that the actual politics—not to be confused with the textual politics of *Le Balcon* and *Truismes*—of straight queer theory cannot be considered without this realm of privacy. Because heterosexuals have access to rights and

legal statuses that are largely denied to many in the LGBTQ community, my research here suggests that the politics of straight queerness seem to invert in order to draw attention to its transgressive nature, relocating into privacy by which to be better understood.

As David Bell and others have demonstrated, public queerness, including sex in socially normative spaces, reinforces the power of being out(side) and proud. Conversely, the straight queer theory manifested in Zahra and other figures like her relates a desire to be in(side) and private, embedding challenge of their queerness—anti-reproductive sex, sadomasochism, intercourse with hybrid animal-humans—within cloistered spaces in which these figures decidedly ignore the panopticon's pressure to self-regulate. The destabilizing elements of straight queer theory as it might be understood in an open, public forum could go ignored—understood to be another part of heteronormative privilege—or worse, could be considered to be a usurpation of queerness by heteronormative dominance. To broadcast both its existence and its power in a heteronormative setting would likely result in an oversimplification that might just seem like another straight couple having sex. This would dissolve the crucial presence of abjection in the scenes we have read and overshadow the central significance of abjection's difficulty.

6.3 THE ABJECT END

Indeed, the abject, once boiled down to its simplest terms, is not more than difficulty. For Jouhandeau, this hardship was a fervent belief in a religious system that seemingly penalized his homosexuality. And while Kristeva's abject can be reduced to disgust, its difficulty is revealed in the fact that disgust always requires a second look, another glance, in the direction of what repulses us. Even for Halperin and Warner, the abject arrives only as a problematic

byproduct of unsafe sex, socially saturated (or not) with the cultural edicts and warnings that render it dangerous. The abject struggles that have faced this dissertation's cast of characters, of course, run the gamut from emotional bruising, to brutality, to rape, to torture, to murder.

Perhaps our fascination with the abject, the very reason for which it cannot be disregarded, is that its power resides in these difficulties. Far more potent than the abject's capacity to frighten or to sicken is its ability to refine through adversity. It offers a confrontation with the unimaginable that only forces us, as subjects, to imagine more and greater possibilities. The abject has largely been seen to conclude—to have the final say in issues of life and death. But as this dissertation has gone some distance to argue, the abject produces and initiates far more than it terminates. And if we can manage to survive it, dare I say it makes us stronger.

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